THE

TOWER;

OR THE

Romance of Ruthyne.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THE

AUTHORESS OF MANFREDI.

VOL. II.

——————— Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our place, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless extacy.———————

SHAKESPEARE.

London:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHORESS, BY HARRY SMITH;

AND SOLD BY

HOOKHAM AND CARPENTER, BOND-STREET.

1798

THE

TOWER, &c.

CHAP. I.

THE unfortunate extinction of her lamp, left Matilda, for a few moments, without any ſenſation but that of terror, till the ſame blaſt that occaſioned the untoward incident, chilled and drove her from the window.

On the neceſſity of having another *light*, ſhe did not a moment heſitate, and endeavoured to find the door, in order to procure *it*. When ſhe had effected this, a faint light, flaſhing up the ſtair-caſe, convinced her, the lamp uſually burning in the hall was not yet out, and, knowing ſhe could eaſily re-light her own from that, ſhe took it in her hand, and deſcended.

The ſolemn ſtillneſs of the venerable hall, and the duſky pillars retiring in perſpective gloom, caſt an awe on Matilda's feelings, that obliged her to pauſe a-while, in hopes of overcoming it; but the dark ſolemnity (far from becoming familiariſed to her by the view) grew too impreſſive to be borne: She took her lamp, and was re-aſcending to her room, when the heavy door leading to the chapel, ſlowly grated on its maſſive hinges.

This, in addition to the preceding circumſtances of the night, was too much for the weakened ſpirits of Matilda: She al-

moſt

moſt expected her fantaſtic terrors to be realized, and that a ſomething unnatural would emerge from the gloomy paſſage; at the entrance of which, ſhe dared not caſt a ſecond look. Again, ſhe heard the door ſlowly move; and, ſwiftly aſcending the ſtairs, ſhe threw herſelf on the firſt ſeat ſhe could reach in her chamber.

The window ſtill remained open, and her terrors forbade her riſing to ſhut it:--- Her lamp, placed on the floor beſide her, was every now and then agitated by the wind, that ruſhed in at the caſement, which augmented its flare, and threw, by ſtronger flaſhes, more expreſſion on the antique furniture of the deſolate chamber.

From a ſtate of benumbed weakneſs, Matilda was arouſed by ſoft light ſteps along the gallery, and ſhortly after ſomething touched her door.

"Where am I?" cried ſhe, ſtarting from her ſeat, and, without knowing what

ſhe did, retired to the farther part of the room.

The noiſe was repeated, and Matilda ſunk on a ſeat, as the door a little opened, and a low voice demanded admittance.

Matilda could not anſwer;---the lamp was dying before the violence of the wind, and ſhe could but juſt diſtinguiſh the perſon who entered, to be Martha.

"My lady," cried ſhe, fearfully advancing, "I am ſure you cannot ſleep here alone! Let me ſit up with you to-night; and to-morrow, if you pleaſe, I will bring my bed in."

This mark of attention and affection obliged Matilda to exert herſelf to thank Martha, who looked at the lamp on the floor, the open window, and her lady's pale countenance by turns, as if her fear of offending, alone witheld her from requeſting an explanation.

Matilda

Matilda bidding her ſhut the window, and ſet the lamp on the table, drew cloſe to the fire, the embers of which the wind had fanned into brightneſs; and Martha, perceiving her cold, aſked if ſhe ſhould fetch ſome more wood, as ſhe knew there lay ſome in the hall, that had been intended for the ſaloon.

"No," cried Matilda, ſhuddering, "you ſhall not go down to-night, Martha."

"I am not afraid, my lady," ſaid Martha, "for I know Suſan will go with me."

"No, no, not to-night, Martha; I will go to bed.

She then laid down without undreſſing, and inſiſted on Martha taking a place by her.

Nothing afterwards diſturbed her, but

the wind, which did not ſubſide till dawn; and ſhe caught a few moments of feveriſh ſlumber; while Martha (notwithſtanding her being in the much-dreaded chamber) ſlept ſoundly by her ſide.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

Thus o'er the dying lamp th' unſteady flame
Hangs quiv'ring on a point, leaps off by fits
And falls again, as loth to quit its hold.
Thou muſt not go ;—my ſoul ſtill hovers o'er thee,
And can't get looſe.

ADDISON.

THE next evening, Matilda ſought to eſcape the notice of the family, and indulge her melancholy by a lonely ſtroll. She had never yet explored the ſcenes that lay to the ſouth ; but without a thought of drawing (at that time) pleaſure from their

beauties, ſhe aſcended the hill that roſe for near half a mile with eaſy aſcent, but was yet high enough to exclude all other view, even from the heights of the Tower.

Her penſive reflections gave place to ſurpriſe, when, at the top of the hill, ſhe found herſelf near a precipice of many feet in depth, but clothed at the foot with the various foreſt productions of Wales. From this giddy height ſhe retired a few paces, and caſt her eyes on the extenſive and romantic view, from which, Deſpair alone could have failed to draw delight.

The fertile vale of Clwyd lay below; beyond which, the blue ocean formed a glittering horizon; and to the right the Clwydian hills, retiring in vaſt extent; their verdant ſides terminating in healthy ſummits, with an old arch ſometimes lifting its head from the emboſoming wood, or a whitened ſpire rearing its ſlender form to ſupport the once-beaming, and ſtill ornamental vane.

The

The contraſt formed by the barren mountains that bounded the vale on the left, was more than pictureſque; the ſetting ſun throwing its warm tint over the landſcape, and darting its changeable luſtre on the pointed rocks, rendered the whole ſublime as well as pleaſing.

Matilda fell into a train of reflections, which, if tinged with ſorrow, were not altogether unpleaſant. From theſe ſhe was arouſed by ſteps behind her, and, turning her head, obſerved, with a mixture of pain and vexation, Mr. Marnonville ſlowly approaching. His whole deportment was more than uſually melancholy, and the traces of anguiſh on his countenance drove away her anger at the interruption, leaving her but a wiſh to ſoothe and relieve him.

"You are come at a ſeaſonable time," ſaid ſhe, "to enjoy this beautiful ſcene."

"Enjoy, do you ſay, lady Matilda?" cried he, throwing a languid glance over the

the proſpect, " Alas! for me there is no enjoyment."

He pauſed, as if to ſtifle his more acute ſenſations, and then reſumed, " I now know all: The kind Waldemar forgot for a moment his own joy, to ſympathiſe with his loſt, unhappy friend."

" Compoſe yourſelf, Mr. Marnonville, ---I am above all affectation, and would not keep you in ſuſpence a moment. You muſt be ſenſible, there can be no happineſs when love is not mutual, and we can never meet in affection."

" Happy, happy Aubincourt!" cried he, throwing himſelf againſt a tree.

" If you ſpeak with regard to me," ſaid Matilda, ſomewhat angrily, " I do not know what you can mean; nor wherefore you take this liberty; but, (continued ſhe,) walking toward the Tower, " if your intention is to inſult me, I find I have ill beſtowed my pity."

" Heavens!

"Heavens! lady Matilda," cried he, following her, with marks of diſtraction in his countenance, "what do you think of me, that you deal thus harſhly? Forgive me.---Indeed, I knew not what I ſaid."

She gave him an aſſurance of her pardon, and he accompanied her back in ſilence.

Matilda was wholly taken up in reflecting on the words Mr. Marnonville had uttered, reſpecting Aubincourt, and amazement was not the leaſt of her ſenſations. She had no idea of his former jealouſy, or that he would have taken any pains to learn how long their acquaintance had been with Mr. Aubincourt. The exclamation alſo led her to an examination of her own feelings, from which ſhe could derive little ſatisfaction, as they informed her, ſhe had ſeen the accompliſhments of Aubincourt with more pleaſure than thoſe of Marnonville, or even the charming Waldemar.

She entered the Tower diſſatisfied, and retired early to her chamber, where ſhe found the conſiderate Martha had placed her bed.

She ruminated all night on the proſpect of her lonely ſituation, and her thoughts not unfrequently recurred to the converſation with Marnonville, whoſe dejected figure haunted her imagination, as much as the words, "*Happy, happy Aubincourt,*" rung in her ears.

At length the day, ſo eagerly wiſhed for by the counteſs, ſo much dreaded by Matilda, was fixed on: the day that was to give to the former her accuſtomed pleaſures, and to tear the latter from her only friend. But her ſorrow was in ſome meaſure diverted, by the extraordinary behaviour of the earl and count, whoſe frequent conferences were marked by unuſual expreſſion of countenances, whenever they joined the company after them.

Martha,

Martha, who, with ſome ſimplicity, poſſeſſed much acuteneſs, and ſtill more curioſity, once remarked to Matilda, that a ſmall room, on the right hand of the library, was always kept locked, and that nobody ever went into it but the earl, the count, and Humphry.

Matilda enquired by what means ſhe knew that; or, if ſhe could tell why Humphry was admitted there?

"I was croſſing the hall laſt night, my lady," ſaid Martha, "after you were gone to bed:---I never love to go about alone, and then I look behind me every minute, for I always think there is ſomebody among the pillars; and ſo ſure enough there was, for, going up to the ſtair-caſe, along came Humphry and the count. I ſhould have paſſed them without ſpeaking, but Humphry aſked me, in his gruff way, what buſineſs I had there? "I am going to my lady's chamber," ſaid I, not knowing what elſe to ſay; and, ſlipping by them, got up ſtairs,

and,

and, wondering where they could be going to at that time of night, I looked over the balluſtrade. Humphry looked up to ſee where I went; but I ſtood behind the pillar, on the top of the ſtairs, as ſly as a fox; "She is gone," ſaid he to the count, and they opened the great heavy door that, I am told, leads to the chapel.

"The door that leads to the chapel?" ſaid Matilda, ſurpriſed.

"Yes, my lady; and I had a great mind to follow them, only I was afraid; and beſides, thinks I, what buſineſs is this of mine:---but, however, I waited to ſee if they would come back again, which they ſoon did, and went into the little room that I tell you of; ſo, to-day I goes to this room, to ſee what there was in it, and behold it was locked; now, is not all this very ſurpriſing, my lady?"

"I do not know about its being ſurpriſing, Martha; but you ſaid, my father went there, too."

"Yes,

"Yes, my lady. I grew ſo curious about this little room, that I could not help watching; and, this afternoon, I ſaw my lord go into it with the count."

"They have ſome buſineſs, perhaps, that does not concern us, and ſo let it drop, Martha."

"Why, yes, my lady, they may have ſome buſineſs, I dare ſay; for, they tell me, the count once lived here."

"Here, Martha!---I think you muſt be miſtaken."

"No, my lady, he certainly lived here. ---Perhaps it would have been better for him if he never had; for, they ſay, he did ſtrange things here."

"You are too apt, Martha, to give ear to every idle tale."

This rebuke, ſilenced Martha; but

Matilda

Matilda was thrown into perplexed thoughts concerning the count and her father; and ſhe was fearful, Martha would talk of what ſhe had ſeen, enough to excite the curioſity of the ſervants, perhaps to the diſpleaſure of the earl.

The ſtory of the count's living once at Ruthyne ſhe hardly believed; and inſtantly rejected the idea of her father's aſſociating with a man, whoſe character was liable to be ſtigmatiſed by the ſurrounding peaſantry; therefore, begging Martha not to mention the ſubject again, it was dropped.

The morning before *that* fixed for departure, a ſervant announced Mr. Aubincourt.

The colour that had lately fled from Matilda's cheek, by an accidental mention of the next day's journey, now ruſhed over her face, with a tint more deep than uſual: ſhe felt her heart flutter, which ſhe was willing

willing to attribute to the weak ſtate of her nerves; and, endeavouring to conquer the tumult that raged for a few moments, in her boſom, ſhe began to converſe, and to liſten, with her accuſtomed eaſe.

The earl was not in the room when Aubincourt entered, but came in ſoon after the firſt compliments were over. He extended his hand juſt as Matilda was about to name their viſitor, and ſurpriſed her by the agitation that wavered over his countenance, as he received that of Aubincourt. But when ſhe turned to the latter, and ſaw his endeavours to repreſs the feelings that (ſpite of himſelf) appeared in his face, ſhe became ſenſible, that he had not only met her father before, but that their acquaintance had been marked by circumſtances unhappy, if not horrible.

The miſerable Marnonville ſat in a corner of the room, and narrowly watching every turn of Matilda's countenance, imagined he ſaw a faint encreaſe of vermillion

in her cheek, whenever Aubincourt addreſſed her, and ſet it down as an irrefragible proof of his being a favoured lover.

Miſs Marnonville, in whoſe eyes he appeared equal, even to her moſt exalted ſtandard of romantic beauty, made ſeveral expreſs attempts to engage his attention; and, mortified at his neglect of her efforts, was planning the beginning of a converſation, in which ſhe might ſhew him how exquiſite her taſte, and refined her ſentiments were; when, to her total defeat, and inexpreſſible vexation, he aroſe; and, after requeſting the earl's permiſſion to viſit Matilda in company with his aunt, took his leave.

Marnonville's fate now appeared to be arrived at its criſis. The fortunate Aubincourt had, in other words, aſked the earl's ſanction to his addreſſing Matilda;---had received it, and would become the poſſeſſor of ſuch a treaſure. His cheek now fluſhed with rage---now grew pale with deſpair;

deſpair; and, unable to bear the notice of the company, he aroſe, and precipitately quitted the room.

The hour of ſeparation (now being ſo near), alone occupied Matilda's reflections, and prevented her obſerving Marnonville's diſtreſs. She was going to loſe the deareſt object of her heart:---to be left in dreary ſolitude, with no one but a female attendant, to whom ſhe could look for a companion:---in a place whoſe terrifying appearance, heightened by the few circumſtances ſhe lately witneſſed, began to have ſome weight on her mind.

One reflection alone remained to ſooth her.

However deep the ſolitude that might ſurround her, it would be preferable to living again at Arthurine;---that very ſolitude was more ſuited to her taſte, than the inſipid gaiety that prevailed there; and her

own thoughts, however melancholy they might be, would be better than the inane attempt at wit, the drawing-room of lady Arthurine produced.

Lord Waldemar had repeatedly requeſted ſhe would accompany Auguſta, whom he propoſed taking to his country-ſeat in Cumberland; but ſhe imagined, that the time when ſhe ſhould moſt wiſh to eſcape from the Tower, would be in the Winter; ---then every thing would be ſtill more dreary, and it would be the time of all others, the moſt uncomfortable for her to live in it.

Perhaps there was a cauſe, unknown even to Matilda herſelf, that kept her at Ruthyne. The ſociety of Mrs. Laurie and Aubincourt, often threw a gleam of anticipated comfort over her mind; and, till the hour arrived when ſhe embraced Auguſta, previous to her departure, ſhe knew not the extent of her misfortune.---

But,

But, when lord Waldemar, by a gentle violence, ſeparated them, and committed her to the care of her woman, ſhe felt as if all hope, all peace, and all happineſs, was loſt to her for ever.

CHAP. III.

These pleasures, Melancholy give,
And I with thee will choose to live.

MILTON.

THE profound stillness that soon reigned throughout the Tower, had such an impressive effect on Matilda, that she hardly dared trust herself alone in any room, except the library, and west parlour, which, from habitude, were grown less solemn to her

her than the reſt. To the former, her ſtudies conſtantly drew her; and, to the latter, the beautiful picture of the young woman, which ſeemed to be now the only friend, except her faithful Martha, ſhe had remaining in the Tower. She felt a kind of awful pleaſure in ſitting oppoſite the portrait, that often kept her hours together in the weſt parlour; and ſhe would ſometimes fancy, that her attachment to the picture muſt have ſome particular cauſe. She would have aſked Humphry concerning it, but his gloomy and repelling manners, forbade her often queſtioning him in any way, but through the means of Martha.

In every other method ſhe took to amuſe herſelf in the ſolemn Tower, whether by a cloſer application to ſtudy, or by oftener exploring the beauties of the country, the dear companion, that once participated and encreaſed her pleaſures, was miſſed. Her wild warblings, that uſed to echo through the arches of the Gothic hall, were now

liſtened for in vain. Her lively ſteps, and ſtill more lively voice, no more broke the awful ſilence. Matilda ſhuddered as ſhe paſſed along the broad gallery, or flitted between the high pillars, as if her own ſhadow was fearful; or the ſound of her footſteps would ſtartle her by their reverberations.

The ſolemn ſtillneſs repreſſed every effort ſhe made to be chearful, and her chilled ſpirits ſunk into a ſteady calm, ſuited to the ſcenes around her, and to the encouragement of ſtudy and reflection.

Near a fortnight paſſed in this manner, and Matilda began to wonder at the delay of Mrs. Laurie's viſit. She recollected, that Aubincourt muſt know that the whole party, except herſelf, had left the Tower, and felt as if ſhe had experienced actual unkindneſs, ſince Mrs. Laurie had ſaid, ſhe would viſit them immediately on the departure of their gueſts, and now that ſhe was in the deepeſt ſolitude, it would have been

been but conſiderate in her to have performed the promiſe.

A few days after theſe reflections, Mrs. Laurie and Aubincourt paid her a viſit. She received them in the hall with joy, but Mrs. Laurie was pale and thin.

"What is the matter, my dear madam," cried Matilda, "you look ill.---Was it for this I felt hurt at your abſence?"

"I have been unwell," cried Mrs. Laurie, "or I ſhould not have left you thus in ſolitude. I would not let you know, leſt I ſhould alarm you, and you ſhould have viſited me; for I ſuppoſed at firſt my diſorder was a fever."

While theſe words were paſſing, Matilda conducted her to the weſt parlour, where Aubincourt followed; and, caſting his eyes on the picture of the old man, that hung next to the beautiful female, ſeemed to undergo ſome little agitation; but,

but, looking immediately on the other, he threw himſelf on a ſeat, and, leaning back his head, a few convulſive emotions paſſed lightly over his countenance.

Mrs. Laurie ran to him, and, in broken accents, aſked the reaſon of his illneſs.

He ſaid nothing, but ſighed, and endeavoured to riſe.

Matilda, without knowing why, felt unuſually alarmed:---She ſeemed to be ſenſible Aubincourt's illneſs was not merely accidental; and, without a thought of what ſhe was doing, threw her arms over the back of a chair, and burſt into tears.

This recalled Aubincourt's ſenſes, and Mrs. Laurie's preſence of mind.---They flew to her.

"Amiable Matilda," cried Aubincourt, "ſuffer not thus on my account:---Let us leave this room, and I ſhall be myſelf again.

Can

Can you forgive me, that I have thus diſtreſſed you?"

Matilda looked at him;---an expreſſion like that of calm inſanity, was yet in his face.---She gave him her hand, and he led her immediately to the ſaloon, and after ſome minutes, a profound ſilence enſued.

Aubincourt was the firſt who ſpoke.

"My emotions, lady Matilda, muſt not only appear extraordinary to you, but may leave an impreſſion on your mind of painful uncertainty as to their cauſe. It is not poſſible for me to explain it. That elegant, unfortunate woman!---I dare not truſt myſelf on the ſubject. Ah, Matilda! ---This Tower---this very Tower!"---

He ſtopped---looked more wild than before; and Matilda, terrified, beſought him not to diſtreſs himſelf by any explanations.

Mrs. Laurie wept.

At that moment a ſoft and querulous voice breathed a few affecting notes, apparently ſounding from the chapel.

Aubincourt ſtarted.---Matilda and Mrs. Laurie liſtened, without believing their ſenſes; for, in an inſtant, the ſounds died away, and the whole appeared like a dream.

"From whence come theſe tones?" cried Mrs. Laurie.

"I cannot imagine," returned Matilda, ſomewhat fearfully, "that is the chapel wing, and no one inhabits ſuch a deſolate place!"

A thouſand remembrances ruſhed over her mind; particularly the warning of Humphry, when ſhe had met him in the chapel; and this circumſtance, which might be merely ſimple, (the voice of a peaſant girl, or even one of the domeſtics, by accident rambling that way,) had ſuch an

an effect on her ſpirits, that ſhe dreaded night ſhould come, when ſhe ſhould again be alone in the Tower.

The hour of ſeparation too ſoon arrived.

Mrs. Laurie, affected by Matilda's lonely ſituation, promiſed to ſee her again very ſoon, and that ſhe would ſend Aubincourt to fetch her to the Villa.

"Keep up your ſpirits, my love," added ſhe, "ſolitude is a friend to a mind like yours; but you muſt not indulge in it too deeply. I promiſe you, that Charles and myſelf ſhall ſometimes break into it; and when we do not, you muſt come and enliven ours."

A weak melancholy clung to Matilda's heart when they departed, and after it, even the ſimple prattle of Martha failed to make her ſmile.

CHAP. IV.

MATILDA felt more than common uneaſineſs, in reflecting on the extraordinary emotions of Aubincourt, which he had himſelf avowed, aroſe on the ſight of the picture to which ſhe was ſo much attached.

"This," exclaimed ſhe, "juſtifies my preſentiment, that a ſomething intereſting belonged to this portrait. Yet why ſhould it affect Aubincourt."

Perhaps, this queſtion gave her more pain,

pain, than all her curioſity concerning the fate of the beauty ſhe ſo much admired.

Few days elapſed before Mrs. Laurie, who began to feel a lively affection for Madilda, ſent Aubincourt, to entreat that ſhe would ſpend the day with them. She accordingly took David, and returned with him to his aunt, who was anxiouſly waiting for them in the portico. The air came cool and refreſhing, and Aubincourt bringing his flute, they reſolved to ſpend the morning there in muſic; Mrs. Laurie touching a ſmall guitar with exquiſite taſte, and Matilda being prevailed on to accompany it with her voice.

While ſhe ſung, Aubincourt ſometimes regarded her with an air almoſt approaching to tenderneſs. The warmth of the weather had tinted her cheek with a delicate carnation, and the ſimple ſtyle of her dreſs, gave additional elegance to a form of the moſt noble ſymmetry. Her hair was half confined by a ſmall hat, and the reſt floated

over

over her ſhoulders, or waved on her fore-head, with a beauty never to be imitated by the moſt refined art.

She once lifted her eyes in a pauſe of the air ſhe was ſinging, and met thoſe of Aubincourt, ſuffuſed with tears ;---a new ſenſation ran through her frame ;---ſhe thought ſhe read in his countenance the ſame emotions ſhe experienced. Her voice grew more tender, and at the cloſe, ſoftened into a tone ſo exquiſite, that Aubincourt ſtarted from his ſeat, and wandered into the ſhrubbery.

" The feelings of Charles," cried Mrs. Laurie, looking after him, " have been ſoftened by misfortune, almoſt into weakneſs: Theſe ſtarts are not uncommon. I have known him unable to bear the ſound of his own flute, when the remembrance of paſt circumſtances has made him breathe it with peculiar melancholy.

Matilda dared not enquire what were thoſe

thoſe circumſtances, nor did Mrs. Laurie offer to dwell on them.

" Come," ſaid ſhe, " we will walk, too, if you are not tired, and I will ſhew you a proſpect."

She led Matilda to a ſmall, but elegant pavilion, on the ſkirts of the ſhrubbery, from which, a view, enriched b the hand of Summer, opened in the moſt grand and beautiful dreſs.

On a riſing hill, at a ſmall diſtance, were the venerable ruins of a caſtle, and the landſcape through the broken arches, had an effect to Matilda, altogether new. A few remaining towers ſhook to every blaſt, and were too unſteady, even to afford a ſafe refuge to the owl or bat.

Down a precipice, nearer to the villa, ruſhed, a torrent into a natural baſon; and over the ſtream, at the top of the rock, was thrown a rude bridge, reſembling thoſe

that are ſometimes placed over Alpine chaſms, which finiſhed the pictureſque.

The dingle between the precipice and the hill, wound to the left, and was ſoon hid from the view, by the interſperſion of a chain of mountains.

Aubincourt joined them in the pavilion, with a book of poems in his hand. The traces of ſenſibility were yet viſible in his countenance, and all his actions were marked by a gentle melancholy, more pleaſing to Matilda's ſoul, than the moſt animated livelineſs.

He read a few lines to them while they remained in the pavilion, but he carefully avoided all pathos, and choſe the more ſublime or deſcriptive poetry. His native fire began to illumine his countenance, and his touching penſiveneſs was loſt in energy, till a ſervant ſummoned them to dinner. The moment the book was cloſed, his countenance reſumed its wonted melancholy,

choly, which now was more apparent to Matilda than ever it had been before.

The dinner was ſerved in the light hall adjoining the portico, and Mrs. Laurie's wit enlivened the repaſt. Her well-timed gaiety, in ſome meaſure, diſſipated Aubincourt's low ſpirits; and, before the end of the day, Matilda ventured to drop a hint, of Mrs. Laurie's ſpending ſome little time with her at the Tower.

"If you deprive me of my companion, lady Matilda," ſaid Aubincourt, with a ſmile, "you muſt permit me to viſit her frequently at Ruthyne."

Matilda bluſhed;---ſhe was not, till then, aware of what ſhe had done, but yet was inwardly pleaſed, that Aubincourt did not ſeem averſe to her propoſal. Mrs. Laurie made no objection; and Aubincourt himſelf fixed the day on which ſhe ſhould begin the viſit.

When Matilda was about to return, Mrs.

Laurie propoſed accompanying her a little way; and, on leaving the villa, Aubincourt, with more timidity than ever he had ſhewn in her preſence, offered her his arm. Mrs. Laurie ſuffered them to ſtroll on before, while ſhe ſtooped to gather a plant, whoſe variegated leaves attracted her notice.

"Mrs. Laurie," cried Aubincourt, with an air of friendſhip, "Matilda, is formed to be your companion. She is my father's ſiſter, and her ſociety alone has endeared me to life."

He ſtopped, and endeavoured to ſtifle his emotions. At length he continued:

"She is a woman who has broke through the narrow and unjuſt bounds preſcribed for her ſex. Like you, my dear Matilda, ſhe knows how to unite the feminine character with genius, with ſenſe, and reflection. Forgive my freedom. I muſt call you my *dear Matilda*. Alas! you know not

not the unfortunate circumſtances that draw you to my heart.

A few tears rolled down his cheeks;---Matilda wept profuſely.---She knew not why;---but Aubincourt was unfortunate, and ſhe wept, ſhe thought, for him.

"You muſt permit me," continued he, "to call you my friend.---Perhaps you will, one day, hear the particulars of my life;---till then, if I can avoid it, I will diſtreſs you no more with my melancholy. But you, too, are always penſive. Tell me, Matilda, have you ever experienced any real unhappineſs? Do not fear to truſt me with the cauſe of your thus appearing different from the generality of young women. Ah, how like the unfortunate Seraphine, the firſt moment I ſaw her!"

Matilda, arreſted by his laſt words, forbore to anſwer him.

"Are you unwilling to confide your

ſorrows to me, Matilda? Perhaps I am wrong; they may be of a nature too delicate to mention."

Matilda haſtily aſſured him, nothing had ever given real pain, but the departure of her ſiſter.

"Beware!" cried he, with energy, "Beware of *love*, Matilda, as you value *peace*."

Matilda ſhuddered at his earneſtneſs, and felt an indefinable ſenſation, as he uttered theſe words: It crept through her frame, and ſeemed to touch her very heart with a preſentiment of impending evil.

Mrs. Laurie now joined them, and reminded Aubincourt, it was almoſt time to turn back. Matilda again mentioned the day on which ſhe ſhould expect Mrs. Laurie, and they ſoon after ſeparated.

Aubincourt's ſenſibility,---his pathetic complaints,

complaints,---the name he mentioned,---but above all, the ſolemn injunction he had given, occupied Matilda's thoughts, and even her dreams, till the arrival of Mrs. Laurie gave a new turn to them. Delicacy forbade her even ſhewing to that lady a deſire of knowing more than ſhe had been able to gather from Aubincourt's obſcure hints; but ſhe did not ſcruple to give the name of Seraphine to the beautiful portrait, in which ſhe now felt anxious to trace a faint reſemblance of herſelf.

Matilda ſoon found the truth of Aubincourt's predictions. Mrs. Laurie was, in every reſpect, formed for her maternal friend. Her correct taſte in muſic and painting, delighted as well as improved her; and, however different their years, their manners, their taſtes, and their diſpoſitions, were nearly the ſame.

Aubincourt, delighted with the pleaſure they gave each other, was now very frequent in his viſits to the Tower. By de-

grees, his favourite authors, and muſical inſtruments, were removed there; he ſeemed to live but in the ſociety of his aunt and Matilda; and his company always encreaſed their felicity.

One afternoon, Matilda was giving Mrs. Laurie a ſhort detail of their party who accompanied her father to the Tower, and, among the reſt, mentioned De Laffon.

Aubincourt, who had been intent on correcting a ſmall drawing of her's, looked up, and appeared ſomewhat intereſted in her remarks.

"I am not able," ſaid ſhe, "to account for my antipathy to that man, but certainly I have a very ſtrong one."

Aubincourt appeared uneaſy, and changed colour.

"I believe," continued ſhe, "his haughtineſs, and a certain expreſſion of cruelty and

and diſdain that is in his face, make me believe they are features of his character; if not, I muſt call myſelf guilty of unjuſt prejudice.

She now remarked, that Aubincourt's countenance underwent much change, and that Mrs. Laurie appeared purpoſely ſilent. She wiſhed to go a little farther, to know if her ſuſpicions were true, and mentioned the report ſhe had heard, of his once inhabiting the Tower.

Aubincourt now abruptly aroſe, and left the room.

"Can Charles be ill?" cried Mrs. Laurie, alarmed.

"I hope not," ſaid Matilda, muſing; for his manner encreaſed her curioſity, and, from ſeveral paſt incidents, ſhe grew certain his fate was in ſome way connected with the Tower.

In about an hour he returned, but he was more pale than uſual. Matilda enquired if he had been ill; he ſmiled at her apprehenſions, and ſaid, he had taken a little ramble in the foreſt.

Mrs. Laurie looked at him without ſpeaking; and, as if to eſcape her notice, he begged Matilda would play and ſing, that he might accompany her.

No hint was afterwards given of his abrupt departure, nor was the converſation of the count renewed.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

"YOU muſt recollect, my dear Matilda," ſaid Mrs. Laurie, one morning, "that I have not yet ſeen half the rooms of your Tower. Suppoſe you gratify my curioſity ſo far as to ſhew me them.

Matilda conſented, and accompanied her through all the inhabited rooms. Arriving at the eaſt wing, ſhe mentioned the ſervants' terrors on its account, and aſked Mrs. Laurie if ſhe choſe to venture.

"Moſt

" Moſt aſſuredly," ſaid ſhe, " I ſhould like to ſee a haunted room; the title gives an air of intereſt to it which another does not poſſeſs. Is it this? Come, let us enter."

She opened the door, but ſtopped a moment, when ſhe ſaw its dreary appearance.

" And is this the room you ſlept in, Matilda? I ſhall henceforth give you credit for courage I do not poſſeſs myſelf. But, hark! what is that? I thought I heard a noiſe. I ſhall grow ſuperſtitious here."

" Will you return?" ſaid Matilda.

" No, not now;---let us go on:---Are all theſe rooms like this?"

" I hardly know," ſaid Matilda, " I have ſeen only one more."

They entered the next, but finding little in it worthy notice, they proceed-

ed

ed to another door, which appeared locked.

" I think I can open this," ſaid Mrs. Laurie, obſerving it appeared old; and, ſetting her foot againſt the bottom, it flew open. Immediately another door clapped with violence, in a different part of the wing; and Mrs. Laurie precipitately ſtepped back.

Matilda liſtened;---ſhe imagined ſhe heard a ſtep, and regarded not the emotions of Mrs. Laurie, till ſhe exclaimed:

" Matilda, have you ſeen that room?"

" Never," returned ſhe, " Why do you look ſo pale?---What is the matter?"

" Nay, I can hardly tell;---Will you enter with me?"

" Certainly," cried Matilda; and, puſhing open the door, ſhe diſcovered a room hung

hung on all ſides with black, lighted by one high narrow window, and in the middle a coffin, covered with a black pall, ſupported on a bier. An altar was at the upper end of the room, and above it, a large crucifix, with a ſmall ſtool for kneeling.

Matilda and Mrs. Laurie felt their blood run cold at theſe ſights, and neither, for ſome time, eſſayed to ſpeak.

"Will you dare to lift that pall?" cried Mrs. Laurie, at length.

"I cannot," exclaimed Matilda, faultering.

"Neither can I," ſaid ſhe, "but let us quit this place."

They had returned to the firſt room, when Mrs. Laurie recollected the door was left unfaſtened.

"There is no danger," ſaid Matilda, "of

" of the ſervants having curioſity enough to explore theſe apartments; their terrors are our ſecurity."

They deſcended, and, for that day, thought no more of looking over the Tower.

A thouſand phantaſies now filled the minds of Mrs. Laurie and Matilda; and conjectures as improbable as their fears were powerful, filled their heads for the reſt of the day; the foremoſt of which, was concerning the coffin, and what they ſhould have ſeen, could they have had courage enough to lift the pall. All enquiries were uſeleſs, had there been any one of whom it would have been proper to enquire; and the ſole reſult of their conſultations was, that the next day they would examine the other room, to ſee if any thing there, tended to throw a light on the extraordinary furniture in the Black Chamber.

CHAP. VI.

Be mine, to read the viſions old,
Which thy awakening bards have told;
And, leſt thou meet my blaſted view,
Hold each ſtrange tale devoutly true.

COLLINS.

THE next day, the ladies aſcended the ſtairs, with a determination of examining the laſt room, which Matilda ſuppoſed to have immediate communication with the chapel. They ſhuddered as they paſſed the door of the Black Chamber; and on finding

finding all their efforts were inſufficient to open the other, Matilda reluctantly ſummoned Humphry.

Mrs. Laurie, who had never ſeen him before, was ſtruck, and ſomewhat terrified at his uncouth perſon, and rough manners.

"Humphry," ſaid Matilda, "we wiſh for the key of this room."

"Why would you enter there?" ſaid he, in his uſual harſh tone.

"Why do you wiſh to prevent me?" ſaid Matilda, angry at his rudeneſs; "Is it not ſufficient that it is my deſire?"

"Perhaps not, lady."

"Will you diſpute my authority, Humphry?"

He turned ſullenly away. Mrs. Laurie was almoſt frightened at their ſituation,---

remote from the ſervants, and with a man, in whoſe face ſhe could not look without trembling.

" You do not know," cried he, " what you may be demanding, or what you may ſuffer for your curioſity !"

" Shall we find another Black Chamber, Humphry ? or an unburied body ?" ſaid Matilda.

He ſtarted---his countenance expreſſed all the black malignity, of which ſhe ſuppoſed his character was compoſed. She feared ſhe had gone too far ; but, knowing it would be ſtill worſe to ſubmit to his unjuſt authority, ſhe again demanded the key.

He affected ſorrow that ſhe ſhould thus perſiſt in what would end, perhaps, to their terror, and misfortune.

" Do you not remember, lady," cried

eh,

he, "what I told you in the chapel?---There are ſecrets belonging to this wing, too terrible to mention;---it is with reluctance I enter, or even paſs it."

Mrs. Laurie caught Matilda's arm, and beſought her to think no more of entering the chambers; but ſhe, angry that Humphry ſhould thus aſſume an authority over her, and loth to let him believe ſhe was ſo weak as to regard his hints, ſtill perſiſted in demanding admittance.

"If I am not afraid, Humphry, why ſhould you be ſo for me?"

While ſhe was yet ſpeaking, ſome deep tones ſounded as if beneath her, and ſhortly after, the chords of an inſtrument formed a few impreſſive notes, but they ſoon ceaſed.

"You hear," cried Humphry, agitated, "and yet you will not believe.---Do you perſiſt in demanding the key?"

"I do," cried Matilda, whoſe natural courage and fortitude was heightened by anger.---But Mrs. Laurie again ſeized her arm, and was endeavouring to lead her from the chamber, when Martha, pale and ſpeechleſs, ruſhed along the gallery, and, by her dumb, though agonizing ſigns of entreaty, drew them after her.

When they deſcended, they found the ſervants running about in confuſion; every one with terror in their faces, and not one but David able to ſpeak. From him, Matilda was requeſting an explanation, juſt as Aubincourt opened the door of the ſaloon, and joined them.

Matilda was on the lower ſtep of the ſtairs:---She extended her hand to him, exclaiming, "You are the friend we want!"

He preſſed her hand with an air of a brother, and begged to know what had thus agitated her.

She could not anſwer;---her ſpirits were entirely

entirely exhauſted, by her converſation with Humphry.---Martha's terrifying appearance, and the confuſion of the ſervants, overcame her. She threw her eyes around, as if in ſearch of relief, and fainted in the arms of Mrs. Laurie.

It was this moment ſhewed Aubincourt the eſtimation in which Matilda was held by her ſervants. All fears were now forgotten, except thoſe that were entertained for her. The diſtracted Martha was on her knees, firmly graſping the robe of her ſenſeleſs lady, and David, little leſs agitated, was flying to the weſt wing for water: even the inferior ſervants, whoſe offices ſhe had always contrived to render eaſy, if not pleaſant, were wringing their hands in prayers for her reſtoration to life.

Aubincourt himſelf ſupported her in his arms; for Mrs. Laurie, incapable of aſſiſtance, was leaning againſt a pillar, to keep herſelf from falling,) and, perhaps, for the firſt time, felt the power of her beauty over his heart. Her eyes were firſt lifted

to him, and the joy that ſhone on his countenance, communicated itſelf inſtantly to the ſervants. He carried her to the ſaloon, and laying her on a ſofa, after committing her to the immediate care of Martha, returned to ſatisfy and aſſiſt his almoſt fainting aunt.

From her, he learned the cauſe of Matilda's illneſs; but the alarm of the ſervants yet remained without explanation; therefore, ſending for David to the ſaloon, as ſoon as Matilda was perfectly reſtored, he deſired him to account for the confuſion in which the hall was found.

He related, that one of the under maids being ſent to acquaint Mrs. Laurie and Matilda with Mr. Aubincourt's arrival, ſhe followed the ſound of their voices, and, without knowing whither ſhe was going, went directly to the eaſt wing. Her terror at being where ſhe never had been before, occaſioned her to turn wrong, in a paſſage that communicated ſeparately to the

the four rooms, and, inſtead of returning to that next the gallery, ſhe puſhed open the door of a Black Chamber, in which ſtood a coffin. She now, by accident, recollected ſhe was in the dreaded wing, and actually in the haunted apartment. She imagined ſhe ſaw a white figure open an oppoſite door; and, hurrying out in all the phrenzy of fear, reached the hall, and alarmed the reſt of the ſervants with her extravagant terrors. Martha, whoſe affection for her miſtreſs outweighed every other conſideration, flew up ſtairs immediately, to get Mrs. Laurie and Matilda from the fatal chamber, and her wild geſtures completing Matilda's agitation, occaſioned her ſwooning.

Matilda could not but remark, that during David's account, Aubincourt appeared not more intereſted than agitated; and ſhe attentively liſtened to the queſtions he put, concerning theſe rooms. But though a few words dropped which ſhewed him well acquainted with ſome things that ſurpriſed

her, his converſation no ways tended to relieve her curioſity, reſpecting the former inhabitants of the Tower.

The evening drew them into the foreſt, and every unpleaſant ſenſation was forgotten, as Matilda leaned on the arm of Aubincourt, and liſtened to his remarks, dictated by elegance, and ſtrengthened by genius, reflection, and the energies of an uncommon mind.

As ſhe ſome times looked up, while he was ſpeaking, ſhe could hardly perſuade herſelf it was the ſame Aubincourt with whom ſhe had walked, in that foreſt, but a few weeks before. Then, a certain melancholy, ſhaded his features, that almoſt partook of inſanity; his words were as wild as his looks, and an indefinable awe had mixed with her pity, while ſhe liſtened to his plaints, and to his injunctions. Now his real character was leſs obſcured by thoſe heavy clouds; and, though its native fire was ſtill ſomewhat veiled, by the

lurking

lurking influence, and the ſolemnity of his mien, ſtill denoted uncommon ſuffering, a lambent fluſter played from beneath the ſhade, and his frame of mind appeared to have undergone a complete revolution. If his features were now ſometimes touched with ſorrow, it was, when ſome powerful recollection vibrated on the chords of his heart, and even then it was tempered by reſignation.

They wandered till late in the evening, and twilight had long veiled the world, before they caught ſight of the Tower in their return. At the extremity of an angle attached to the eaſt wing, Matilda imagined ſhe ſaw a white object; but as the place was ſhaded by tall trees, ſhe could not be certain, and forbore to mention it till ſhe plainly ſaw it move. She graſped the arm of Aubineourt, and intenſely followed the figure with her eyes, till it diſappeared ---ſhe knew not how.

Mrs. Laurie had not obſerved the figure,

nor

nor the alarm of Matilda. Aubincourt impreſſively made the latter underſtand, how much he wiſhed a ſtrict ſilence to be obſerved, and, though horror was painted in his countenance, he anſwered to ſome trifling queſtion of his aunt's, without much difficulty.

When they entered the Tower, Mrs. Laurie obſerved, by the lamp hanging in the hall, that Matilda was pale, and almoſt breathleſs.

"I believe ſhe is not well, my dear aunt," cried Aubincourt, haſtily, "will you ſend for ſome water?"

While Mrs. Laurie was ſummoning a ſervant, he endeavoured to re-aſſure the alarmed Matilda, and again begged ſhe would conceal the whole from her friend, whoſe ſpirits were weak, and whoſe moſt conſpicuous foible, was ſuperſtition.

Matilda promiſed obſervance, and Mrs. Laurie

Laurie returning with water, they entered the ſaloon.

The moon was now riſing, and Aubincourt, fearful, perhaps, of betraying his own emotions, rejected a propoſition of Mrs. Laurie's, for lights to be brought.

"I love this ſoothing hour," ſaid he, "and theſe darting beams will ſhortly diſcloſe the landſcape before us. Look, Matilda, at that tree, how its leaves tremble to the encreaſing radiance,---and that dark curvature yonder, beſide the hill,---with the wood that waves over it.---You do not obſerve it, Matilda!"

"Pardon me, "cried ſhe, "I am looking." But the countenance of Aubincourt, while he affected to be taken up by the beauties of the moonlight ſcene, had drawn her eyes from that to him. The animation he had diſplayed in the foreſt was all fled, and a ſort of gloomy horror had taken poſſeſſion of his features. His eye-brows were

were elevated, and his fine open forehead was furrowed with deep lines, over which a part of his hair had fallen, that gave a ſombre caſt to his whole face. The moon beams partially ſhone on him, and aided, in Matilda's eyes, the ſolemnity of his appearance. He found ſhe was noticing him; and, leaning back in his chair, he ſung, in a melancholy, yet pleaſing voice, the firſt ſtanza of a ſonnet.

He had ſcarcely cloſed the laſt note, when a voice, much fainter, yet not leſs ſweet or melancholy, began the ſecond, while the trio, for a moment, doubted whether it was illuſion or reality, or whether the muſic was in the ſame room, or at a little diſtance.

Aubincourt firſt recovered from this ſtate, and, ruſhing out of the room, they heard him impetuouſly aſcend the ſtaircaſe, and pace the gallery, toward the eaſt wing. Matilda aroſe, and threw herſelf on the floor,

floor, before Mrs. Laurie, who bent over, and half raiſed her, but neither of them could ſpeak.

Near half an hour elapſed, when Mrs. Laurie began to loſe fears for herſelf, in apprehenſions for Charles.

"Oh, merciful Heaven!" cried ſhe, "that his fate ſhould thus intimately be connected with this horrid Tower!"

A ſtart from Matilda warned her of her imprudence; and a queſtion immediately followed, of the meaning of what had paſſed.

"You will one day know, my love," cried ſhe, "but it is not for me to tell you."

Another half hour wore away, and their impatience for Aubincourt encreaſed. At length the hall door opened, and in the

next minute, Aubincourt himſelf entered the ſaloon.

Mrs. Laurie would have queſtioned him, but a lamp he held in his hand, ſhewed her all the wildneſs of his figure, and ſhe remained ſilent. He put the lamp on a table, and, after pacing the length of the room two or three times, ſeated himſelf beſide Matilda.

" I am continually diſtreſſing you, my ſweet friend," cried he, taking her cold hand, " and have never yet acquainted you with the cauſe of my melancholy."

He ſtopped a while, to check his emotions, and then reſumed:

" It is too late to-night, nor are you able to ſupport the fatigue of hearing a long ſtory.---Some other time,---perhaps ſoon,---you ſhall hear it;---yes, hear it from me:---but now, farewell,---Farewell,

well, my aunt;---remember me in your prayers;---and, if you, Matilda, can pity, ---pray for the unfortunate Aubincourt

He waited not for their farewells, but left the Tower in an inſtant; and the friends, overcome by the occurrences of the day, immediately retired.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

How is it with me, when every noiſe appals me?

SHAKESPEARE.

TWO days had paſſed, and the third was wearing toward a cloſe, ſtill Aubincourt did not re-viſit the Tower. Mrs. Laurie began to be alarmed; and Matilda, who deeply conſidered all that had paſſed, ſought to relieve in ſolitude, thoſe anxious feelings that

that oppreſſed her, and, retiring to her chamber, ſeated herſelf by the window.

Mrs. Laurie was too delicate to diſturb her; therefore, ſecretly diſpatching a ſervant to the villa, to enquire after Aubincourt, ſhe took a ſhort walk to beguile the time till he ſhould return.

Matilda would have perſuaded herſelf, ſhe was employed in watching the various tints the declining ſun threw on the tall mountains; yet, in ſpite of herſelf, ſhe could not avoid ſometimes ſuffering her eyes to wander up the foreſt avenue, hoping Aubincourt might ſoon relieve their apprehenſions on his account. She recollected his ruſhing up the ſtairs with a kind of ſhuddering horror, and felt her impatience for the promiſed ſtory encreaſe, as its connexion with the Tower muſt render it intereſting to her, even were it barren of thoſe incidents the uncommon behaviour of Aubincourt ſeemed to announce.

As the ſinking ſun lengthened the ſhadows of the trees, ſhe ſometimes imagined ſhe could diſcern objects in the extremity of the avenue; but ſhe ſoon found her hopes, as well as her eyes, had deceived her, and the laſt gleams of the ſun faded from the mountain tops, without any appearance of Aubincourt.

As ſhe ſat muſing, with her head reſting on her arm, ſhe once more imagined ſhe ſaw a figure in the avenue, and, looking ſteadily, ſoon diſtinguiſhed a perſon on horſeback. Somewhat ſurpriſed at this, ſhe began to fear it could not be Aubincourt; and, as the perſon entered the lawn, ſhe opened the caſement, that ſhe might be able to aſcertain, and felt her heart ſink, when ſhe diſcovered it to be the count De Laffon.

An unaccountable preſentiment took poſſeſſion of her mind, at the appearance of this man; and, giving way to the impulſe

of

of the moment, ſhe determined not to leave her chamber that night.

When Martha announced his arrival, Matilda pleaded a head-ache, and begged the count would excuſe her that evening; but Martha returned, and before ſhe could give a ſecond anſwer, ſhe heard the count's voice in the gallery; and, underſtanding he had followed the maid up ſtairs, ſhe was compelled to leave her room to receive him.

After a few ſlight anſwers to ſome of his ardent interrogatories, Matilda took the arm of Martha, and was croſſing toward the ſtaircaſe, but he caught her hand.

"I would ſpeak to you here, Matilda," cried he, "diſmiſs your maid;---we muſt converſe on an important ſubject."

Matilda heſitated; but Martha looſing her arm, immediately deſcended, and Matilda had no power to ſtop her.

The count then drew her to a window near the eaſt wing, and began to ſpeak of a paſſion, as unexpected by Matilda, as diſagreeable to her. Surpriſe deprived her of ſpeech; and De Laffon interpreting her ſilence in his own favour, was giving words to the joy that filled his boſom, when a noiſe, at no great diſtance, ſtopped him. A few lingering beams that yet tinted the weſtern horizon, diſcovered to Matilda the fearful wildneſs that overſpread his countenance; but, ſoon recovering himſelf, he again mentioned his hopes. Matilda inſtantly checked them, by a brief, yet firm denial. He again ſtarted at a noiſe, which proved to be a cloſing door.

"It is nothing," he cried; "but why, Matilda, are you thus cruel?---Do not oblige me to produce the order, which, I hoped, would have been but a ſanction!"

A faint groan drew his attention from Matilda before ſhe could anſwer; and ſhe watched his countenance, which bore a very

very peculiar caſt. The twilight was now much deepened, and the dark gallery was particularly ſolemn. The count endeavoured to regain his compoſure, but he could only faulter out, "Let us leave this place."

"Of what are you afraid, my lord?" ſaid Matilda.

"Afraid!" cried he, attempting to laugh, "of what ſhould I be afraid?"

A lower, yet more appalling groan, ſucceeded his words, and Matilda herſelf began to be terrified.

The count ſeized her arm, and ſhe ſuffered him to lead her down ſtairs.

In the ſaloon they found Mrs. Laurie, who had lately returned from her walk; and after the introduction, each of the party remained ſilent. Matilda and the count were reflecting on the few preceding

minutes; nor were the thoughts of Mrs. Laurie leſs intereſting.

A ceremonious ſupper ſucceeded this uncomfortable evening, and not one of the pleaſing powers the count poſſeſſed, was exerted to detain the ladies from retiring early to their chambers.

"Good night, my child," ſaid Mrs. Laurie, as ſhe paſſed Matilda in the gallery, "Aubincourt is well, but we ſhall not ſee him at the Tower yet!"

Matilda kiſſed her hand with ſilent thankfulneſs, and the unpleaſant intruſion of the count was almoſt forgotten. But the moment ſhe was alone, his extraordinary declaration, and the mandate he mentioned, (which, doubtleſs, was from her father,) ruſhed acroſs her mind. She could but determine to continue firm in her rejection of a man for whom ſhe had ſo decided an averſion, let the conſequence be what it would; and, though a dread of the

evil

evil it might bring, ſeemed to hang on her ſpirits, ſhe felt a conſcious rectitude in the reſolution, ſince the count De Laffon ſhe could neither love or reſpect.

The next morning he eagerly ſeized an opportunity of renewing his ſuit; and when Matilda, as calmly as before, rejected it, a deadly paleneſs overſpread his countenance.

"You may, ere long, tremble before the man," cried he, "whom you now thus coolly defy."

"Never, my lord!" ſaid Matilda, with dignity.

"Be not too ſure," returned he.---"A time may come.---Your pride, Matilda, is intolerable.

"I hope, my lord, I ſhall always have pride enough to repreſs inſolence."

" I do not ſue twice, Matilda.

" That would be uſeleſs, my lord.---I have given you my anſwer.

" Yes, Matilda, you have ſigned your own fate.---Read that, and ſee how ſoon you may repent.

He threw her a letter from her father, which, as ſhe had anticipated its contents, did not move her to forget herſelf for a moment. The count was ſurpriſed, and even awed by her compoſure.

" It is not too late yet," cried he, " for Matilda to retract."

She regarded him, for a moment, with the ſteady ſmile of diſdain, and, riſing from her ſeat, attempted to leave the room.

" You are now your own miſtreſs," cried he, " but, the next time we meet, Matilda, ---you may tremble."

She

She felt a chilling horror creep through her veins, as he pronounced theſe words, and, unable to proceed, was obliged to reſeat herſelf.

"Have you no dread of what may be your fate?" cried he, ſeizing her wriſt, "Remember the eaſt wing!---Unheard miſeries await you!---Worſe than death may be your portion!---"

Matilda looked at the count;---ſhe imagined ſhe read in his face the legible characters of confummate villany. A thouſand recollections ruſhed acroſs her mind, and ſhe, ſhuddering, turned away her head.

"Do you, at length, fear me," cried he, tauntingly,---"fear the man you but a moment ago affected to deſpiſe?---Or do you, ---I repeat it---do you repent of your rejection?"

Matilda feared to truſt her voice, but, waving

waving her hand, he threw himſelf from her, and exclaiming, "The next time we meet!"---he quitted the room; and, calling his ſervants, ſoon left the Tower.

The occurrences of the foregoing evening, as well as thoſe of the morning, ſwam in Matilda's thoughts like an imperfect recollection, or a ſtrongly remembered dream. She pauſed in horror on the count's threats, but a faint hope of their impotence, ſerved to ſoften her terrors. Many of his words were inexplicable; his mention of the eaſt wing particularly. And, on the entrance of Mrs. Laurie, ſoon after his departure, ſhe could not avoid diſcloſing the particulars, from the mingled and inſupportable ſenſations ſhe felt of fear and indignation.

Mrs. Laurie, ſtarted at the relation, and folding her hands, thanked Heaven, that her young friend had poſſeſſed a firmneſs of mind ſufficient to repel the attacks of the inſidious count.

"Oh,

"Oh, Matilda!" exclaimed ſhe, "you know not from what you have eſcaped. Aubincourt's ſtory will beſt inform you.---Would he were here, that you might this moment join with me in thanking Heaven, for your deliverance."

"I tell you, I will go to my lady!" exclaimed a voice in the hall, "why ſhould not ſhe know it as well as we?---She ſhall not be kept in ignorance of it.---Let me go---I muſt tell her!"

The next moment, Martha burſt into the room, with a pale face, and haggard look; and, before Matilda could aſk what was the matter, ſhe began to communicate her tale; but her words were ſo wild, and ſo unconnected, that Matilda was obliged to make her begin ſeveral times, before ſhe could form any clear idea of the reaſon of her fright.

As ſoon as ſhe could talk to be underſtood, they found by her account, that David

David having ſeen ſome very alarming appearance in the hall the preceding evening, had refuſed to mention what it was, till he ſhould have ſatisfied himſelf by watching. It appeared, the count's valet and he had ſat up late, and that after the valet had left him, David had gone, without a light, to ſee if the great doors were faſt, but was obliged to retreat into the ſervants' room, where he paſſed the night, as he could not conquer his reluctance to croſs the hall again. His refuſing to communicate the cauſe of his alarm, had given double force to the imaginations of his fellow-ſervants, and every one waited for the next morning with the utmoſt impatience; for he had ſo far overcome his terror, as to determine to watch the next night in the hall, that he might be ſatisfied of the reality or non-exiſtence of what he had ſeen.

Matilda endeavoured to laugh at the terrors of Martha, but could not help finding herſelf infected with them, as well as with the belief, that ſome horrible crime had been

been perpetrated in the Tower, to which the count De Laffon was privy. His alarm in the gallery recurred ſtrongly to her remembrance, as well as the dark hints he had given of the eaſt wing; and ſhe awaited the viſit of Aubincourt with peculiar impatience, as Mrs. Laurie had intimated, his ſtory would throw a light on theſe circumſtances.

In the evening he came, and Mrs. Laurie putting him in mind of his promiſe, he ſeated himſelf between her and Matilda, oppoſite the window. The glowing clouds of evening threw a rich hue over the diſtant landſcape, and a yet warmer tint on the trees, that partially hid it. Aubincourt ſeemed to feel a placid calm, ſuited to the ſcene before him; and, after a few moments heſitation, began his recital.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

Danger, whoſe limbs of giant mould,
What mortal eye, can fix'd, behold;
Who ſtalks his round, an hideous form,
Howling amidſt the midnight ſtorm.

COLLINS.

"IT may be neceſſary to inform you, my dear Matilda, that I am the ſecond ſon of lord Elmwar; and that to him I owe my education, as well as every moral ſentiment, and every principle of religion and rectitude.

"Forming

" Forming a ſtriking contraſt to my brother, whoſe ſtudious taſte led him to prefer retirement, my indulgent parent favoured my arduous wiſh of following the ſteps of my military anceſtors; and, entering the army at nineteen, I began my career with all the enthuſiaſm peculiar to my character.

" My regiment being ordered to the north of England, I took leave of my tender father, whoſe grief wrung my heart with more ſorrow than ever I had before experienced. He had long loſt my mother, whoſe features I in ſome meaſure bore; and, perhaps, it was this reſemblance that made him more loth I ſhould quit him. My brother, too,---my dear Edmund, was loſing his friend, and their united complain s had nearly made me give up my wiſh, and dedicate my days to filial love and friendſhip: but my father gave me a ſpirited exhortation on the duties of a ſoldier, and my young boſom was filled with an emulous

ſpirit

ſpirit of rivaling (or rather adding to) the names of my anceſtors.

" In our retirement, my brother and myſelf had ſeen little of the ſofter ſex, but I had conceived an idea of them, which a few months reſidence at C----- (our winter quarters,) put me in deſpair of ever ſeeing realized.

" Yes, ſurely," cried I, on a view of ſome ladies there, " ſome women in the world muſt be more amiable than theſe, or whence could the poets deduce their ſimilies ?---whence came the beautiful ideas of ſimplicity, united with, and proceeding from refinement; or beauty inſeparable from elegance and intelligence, if all the ſex are like theſe, inſipidly affected, or entirely uninformed. ?

" Perhaps, it was their dreſs that, as well as their manners, gave me little hopes of ever ſeeing my ideas fulfilled. An abſurd

extravagance

extravagance of faſhion, entirely excluded ſimplicity, beauty, or elegance; and, diſappointed in my expectations, I turned from them in diſguſt, and once more ſought amuſement in literature and the fine arts.

"I not unfrequently rode over the romantic environs of C-----, and there, indulging the poetic reveries of my imagination, I uſed to draw a picture of the woman that would be calculated to make me love, and have often ſmiled at the obvious contraſt ſhe formed, to thoſe I thus ſought to eſcape.

"It was in one of theſe excurſions, when (as was cuſtomary) I was unattended, that I entered what appeared to be a ſmall wood, of which my curioſity led me to ſee the extent. It was the latter end of November, and the road, by the over-arching boughs, affording a ſhelter from the bleak northerly wind, I was tempted to prolong my ride; and had proceeded ſeveral miles, before I reflected that I might ride many more, and

not ſee the end of what was undoubtedly a large foreſt.

" The wind all at once ſunk to a dead calm; and a ſlight ruſhing ſound convinced me, a ſhower of rain or hail was coming on. The gloom of evening ſhut in; and, with the returning blaſt, came the promiſed ſtorm, with ſuch violence, that, now compelled to ride for ſhelter, I choſe rather to go on, than return; in which caſe, I muſt have re-meaſured ten miles, before I could reach an habitation that would ſhield me from the fury of the elements.

" In leſs than a quarter of an hour, I found a narrow bye road, that turned into the middle of the foreſt; and, conjecturing it might lead to an opening, I turned my horſe and purſued it, till it decreaſed to a path, ſo narrow, that it was with difficulty I could make my way.

" From the thick boughs, and black clouds, it now became entirely dark; and I began

I began to repent having quitted the broad road, but dared not turn back, leſt I ſhould take a wrong path, and get into a yet more intricate part of the foreſt; for ſeveral paths branched different ways from that in which I was riding. I was ſenſible this muſt lead to an opening or habitation; and, urging my horſe forward, I found myſelf ſuddenly clear of the buſhes, and perceived a ſolitary light at a ſmall diſtance.

" Hope cheared me, and I approached the ſpot. The clouds breaking a little. I perceived I was near a large building, to which, the pale light, wavering and uncertain, had been my only guide.

" I was within a little of the edifice, when it became more dark, and the rain, which had almoſt ceaſed, began to pour on me with redoubled fury.

" It was with much difficulty I found a gate in the wall that encompaſſed the building, which, as I opened, two large dogs

began to bark with inconceivable fury. The light, which had hitherto been my guidance, immediately vaniſhed; and, fearing I ſhould run againſt the dogs, I drew my ſword, and advanced, as near as I could gueſs, to the place from whence the light had iſſued. It was long before I found the entrance, and longer before any one anſwered to my repeated calls.

" The bolts withinſide were at laſt undrawn, and a face, hardly human, appeared between the door and its poſt, half recoiling at the violence of the weather, and apparently as much afraid of me.

" I began to ſupplicate for ſhelter, (for I conceived I had not common courteſy to entreat,) and I obtained a promiſe of aſking, if I might be admitted.

" The door was cloſed on me, and barred with the ſame ſlow caution as before, and I was compelled to wait in the ſtorm half an hour, ere it was re-opened.

" A figure,

" A figure, I knew not what to call, admitted me into a lofty hall, hung around with the barbarous enſigns of the feudal age, from which my conductreſs (for I judged the figure to be female) led me to a room, where ſat a man; the very counterpart of her who had let me in.

" With all the courage I had fancied I poſſeſſed, I could not help wiſhing I had braved the ſtorm, rather than put myſelf into the hands of beings who looked not human. The man's black ſhaggy hair, hung over a face furrowed with indefinable lines; and his eyes, as they turned with a ſuſpicious ſcowl on me, ſometimes glared cruelty, and all the train of horrors that might ſtigmatize a murderer.

" The woman, whoſe locks (be they what they might) were tucked up under a coarſe ſtraw hat, offered me a ſtool to ſit on, and added ſome fuel to the fire, for me to dry my clothes.

" For ſome minutes a profound ſilence reigned, till the violence of the wind and rain cauſing the man to ſtalk to the window, I remarked, the weather was bad. My hoſt returned to his ſeat, and folded his arms, without ſpeaking. Another long ſilence enſued; but the man broke it himſelf at laſt, by ſaying, in a kind of growl,

" Betty, why do you not get out ſome ſupper?---the man may be hungry!"

" Be under no concern for me, my good friend," ſaid I,---" a ſoldier ſhould learn to endure all fatigues. I only want a little ſhelter, and when the rain is over, I ſhall ſoon be at home."

" But Betty, who ſeemed to be ſomewhat compaſſionate, ſpread a cloth on a table, at the upper end of the room; on which ſhe placed ſome dried meat, and fruits, with butter and milk. She then ſeated herſelf at the board, and the man again invited me. I had not eaten ſince the

the morning, therefore joined them without ceremony; and my hoſt growing leſs reſerved, queſtioned me reſpecting my quarters, and offered me a bed.

" I felt a ſtrange ſenſation at my heart, while I heſitated accepting his offer, but, aſhamed of giving way to ſuch an impulſe, I complied with the invitation, and, mentioning my horſe, Betty took a lanthorn, and promiſed to put it into a ſtable.

" You ſmile," ſaid the man, " at Betty's officiouſneſs; I own it is not a woman's office, but ſhe is my groom, my cook, and my chamberlain!"

" I ventured to drop ſome hints of curioſity on the oddity of this, but the man avoided the converſation; and, after talking a while on indifferent ſubjects, ſhewed me the door of a chamber, where, he ſaid, I might repoſe; and bade me good night.

" The firſt view of my chamber ſtruck ſomewhat of an awe on my heart. Four large arched windows, (from whoſe apertures the wind chilled me with cold,) had no ſhutters better than a few ſlight boards, which, on endeavouring to pull from their ſtation, dropped to pieces, or rattled diſmally, without keeping out the weather.

" The high canopied bed, I imagined, muſt be damp, and, though weary and drowſy, forbore to lay myſelf on it; but as my hoſt had given me a lamp, plentifully ſupplied with oil, I determined to keep myſelf awake as long as poſſible, by pacing the length of the room.

" I therefore began my walk, ſometimes ſtopping to remark the lofty dimenſions, and cumberous magnificence of the apartment, which had evidently once been ſplendid, but was now old and decaying; and ſometimes liſtening to the various ſounds the wind made in the crevices of the doors and wainſcot, which was ſuddenly

denly drowned by the furious barking of the maſtiffs, chained in the court yard.

" I opened one of the windows which, I imagined, looked that way, but the total darkneſs prevented my diſtinguiſhing a ſingle object; therefore, cloſing the caſement at the encreaſing clamour of the dogs, I took the lamp and my ſword, and left the chamber.

" At the bottom of a few ſteps that ended in a landing-place, I was ſtartled at the appearance of the old man, looking eagerly out of a window, with the utmoſt marks of fear and agitation.---He appeared equally alarmed at the ſight of me.

" Young man," ſaid he, angrily, " what buſineſs have you here?"

" I imagined, from the dogs, you were in danger of houſebreakers, and am come to your aſſiſtance."

" The

"The man looked at me for a moment with diſtruſt, and a ſomething like cruelty. An horrible ſuſpicion ruſhed on my mind. I ſtood aghaſt, while he ſaid ſurlily:

"Go back to your chamber---when I want help, I will call you."

"He turned away, and I again entering the room, reſumed my walk, till the dogs ceaſed to bark, and the wind was again heard to howl with its former drearineſs.

"It was now time for me to reflect on my ſituation. In the hands of a man, whoſe very looks would have marked him as a robber, or an aſſaſſin; whoſe fears were apparently of the vigilance of juſtice, and whoſe ſolitary manſion might be the ſcene of unheard of deeds, in which I might probably be the next victim.

"Full of theſe thoughts, I determined to endeavour an eſcape from this imagined receptacle of horror; firſt looking round, as

if

if I ſearched for a ſomething to confirm my terrible ſuſpicions. A ſmall door, which had hitherto eſcaped my notice, inſpired me with a wiſh of knowing whither it led. I ſhook it ſome time without effect; for, being bolted or locked, it eluded my efforts, and only exhauſted the ſtrength that I reflected might be neceſſary to effect my eſcape, on which I was bent, though well aware of the difficulty I ſhould have in unfaſtening the doors, finding my horſe, and clearing the wood, in which I had ſo unfortunately loſt myſelf.

"I opened the door more cautiouſly than before, and, deſcending a narrow flight of ſtairs, found myſelf in the room where we had ſupped. The motion for retiring had been made early; it was now about midnight. The wind had ſeparated the clouds, and a few ſtars glimmering faintly, in concert with my lamp, rendered the uncouth furniture of this room more ſtriking, while ſome parts of it were left in deep ſhade.

"In

" In the hall, I put my light in a corner, as well to prevent its flaſhing through any crevices, as to be able to open the ponderous doors. I obſerved, as I was croſſing toward them, a railed gallery round three ſides of the room, a conſiderable height from the floor; over one part of which hung a piece of white drapery, that, while I looked, began to move. In a few moments I diſcovered it was part of a figure, that glided ſlowly to and fro that ſide of the gallery. Surpriſe took poſſeſſion of my faculties, and pity ſucceeded, when I heard frequent ſighs; and at laſt ſaw the figure lean over the baluſtrade, with the drapery wrapped over its face, then ſigh heavily again, and, ſlowly riſing, diſappear.

" Sentiments of compaſſion, and a wiſh to alleviate the diſtreſs I had witneſſed, made me abandon my project of eſcape for a moment, and I ſought a ſtaircaſe whereby I might gain the gallery. Two large flights of black marble, aſcended uniformly from the entrance to each end of the gallery;

lery ; and taking one, I arrived at that part from whence the figure had retired. Here liſtening, I heard the ſame ſoft ſighs, and ſoon a plaintive voice exclaimed in Italian:

" Unfortunate captive ! What will become of thee ?---Whither canſt thou turn for relief ?"

" Agitated almoſt beyond endurance, I dared not ſtir from the ſpot to which this exclamation had riveted me. I breathed with difficulty, and could ſcarce collect my thoughts ſufficiently to debate within myſelf how I ſhould act. Before I could form any plan, footſteps moved in the room, and after a ſhort pauſe the door was opened.

" I retired behind a projecting pillar, that I would not alarm, whoever might iſſue from the room, and the next moment a beautiful female figure entered the gallery, and retired to the end fartheſt from me. I now left the ſhade, and placed myſelf ſo

as

as to be faintly perceived on her turning round, nor was I deceived, when I conjectured my dreſs would aſſure her I did not belong to the manſion. She ſtopped when ſhe ſaw me; ſeemed irreſolute, and was turning round as if to retreat, but on my gently advancing, and repeating the word friend, in Italian, ſhe approached, and drawing a veil over her face, pointed to the open door, and led the way thither. I followed into a deſolate apartment, where little or no furniture ſerved to detract from the drearineſs of its appearance, or to convey an idea of habitation.

"Alas!" cried the elegant captive in Engliſh: "How long is it ſince aught but foes, have been ſeen by the unfortunate Seraphine!"

"While ſhe ſpoke thus, a few embers on the hearth, aſſiſted by a dim lamp, gave me an indiſtinct view of a form, whoſe graceful proportion and youthful ſymmetry was diſplayed in the moſt beautiful

tiful light, by a habit equally ſimple and elegant. Here was all my ideas fully realized. Nay, I had never lifted my imagination to ſuch perfection.

" A ſhort pauſe followed her exclamation. I eſſayed to ſpeak, but when ſhe ſeated herſelf and laid aſide her veil, my heart fluttered with violence, and my whole ſoul was abſorbed by a confuſion, as new as delightful; as oppreſſive as faſcinating. Behold, my dear aunt! in your Matilda, the exact image of Seraphine when ſhe firſt enſlaved my heart!"

Matilda who had liſtened with pale attention to his narrative, now bluſhed at the compliment---the hope-flattering compliment, and while the hand of Aubincourt gently cloſed on hers, almoſt forgot he had been deſcribing the infancy of a paſſion for another object.

" Seraphine," reſumed Aubincourt, " hinted her fears that by ſome unfortu-

nate

nate circumſtance, I had become a captive like herſelf.

" I found language, at length, to inform her of the adventures of the evening, and to aſſure her that I would undertake her liberation, even at the expence of my life.

" But there is no danger;" cried I, with ardour, " a few moments will deliver us from this infernal manſion."

" Alas, ſir!" ſaid Seraphine," you do not recollect the dogs; they have already barked, and one more howl would bring my inhuman gaoler to know the cauſe."

" I felt the propriety of her reaſoning, and recollected the ſtormy night, with the difficulty I ſhould have in finding my horſe; I thought, too, that a better conveyance might be found at a more convenient ſeaſon, by which, Seraphine would not be ſubjected to the diſagreeable neceſſity of riding on horſe-back.

" My

" My anxiety for her, though it raiſed my deſire of conducting her to her friends, almoſt to a pitch of enthuſiaſm, rendered me prudent; and feeling for the delicacy of her ſituation, of which ſhe often evinced her ſenſe by deep bluſhes, I once more aſſured her of protection and liberty, and leaving her, I retired to my apartment.

" I had now no fears for myſelf; and on deſcending into the hall, was at liberty to remark the dark magnificence, and huge grandeur of its furniture and dimenſions. The two ſtair-caſes, and the heavy baluſtrades of the gallery, were the leading features, and ſeemed to have been conſtructed for a race of men approaching the gigantic.

" But even this ſtriking view of Gothic gloom, had not power long to detach my thoughts from the fair unfortunate, with whom I had thus accidentally met. Her fine turned features ſtill appeared before my eyes; the ſoft, yet intelligent expreſ-

ſion of her looks, and her voice modulated by ſenſibility and timidity, yet vibrated in my ears.

"But I forget, Matilda, that I am tiring you.---To-morrow, at this hour, I will reſume my tale. I have wearied my own ſpirits by thus talking; ſing to me, Matilda, and refreſh them; muſic is the beſt balm for a wounded ſpirit."

Not a gleam of the ſun lingered in the weſt; twilight had ſpread its deepeſt gloom, and its laſt ſighs whiſpered through the trees that ſhaded the window. Matilda's voice was in uniſon with Aubincourt's feelings; he ſometimes ſwelled a pauſe with her, and then dropped to the low cadence of a ſecond, and ſoothed himſelf into the peaceful compoſure, from which the recital of his paſt life had drawn him.

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

Now rayleſs Midnight flings her ſable pall
Athwart the horizon, and with pond'rous mace
In, dead repoſe weighs down o'er labour'd nature;
While we, the buſy inſtruments of fate,
Unmindful of her ſeaſon, wake like ghoſts,
To add new horrors to the ſhadowy ſcene.

JEPHSON.

THE next morning, ſo impatiently awaited by the ſervants, at length arrived; and David, in anſwer to the numerous queſtions of what he had ſeen, gave the ſimple word, "*Nothing.*" It is hard to ſay, whether, on this, his companions were moſt

pleaſed or diſappointed ; for notwithſtanding their terrors, the love of the marvellous would have been gratified by ſome horrible recital, and themſelves would have received conſequence, by ſubſtantial proofs of the truth of their ſuſpicions, reſpecting the *ſpirits* of the Tower.

Matilda rewarded David for his courage, in venturing to watch, ſince he had really believed he ſaw a ſomething the preceding night, not altogether natural ; and thanked him for thus ſtifling, by his prudent reſolution, the ignorant clamours of his fellow ſervants.

In the evening, Aubincourt came, and, faithful to his promiſe, renewed his ſtory. Matilda, who had with difficulty concealed her emotions on the laſt evening, now determined to employ herſelf in ſomething, that ſhould not ſubject her to much obſervation : She, therefore, placed her drawing table near the window, and began ſketching

ſketching a figure, while Aubincourt reſumed his narrative:

"The lamp given me by the man would hardly light me to my chamber again, ere the dry wick refuſed to burn, and ſunk amidſt the almoſt exhauſted oil, leaving me in total darkneſs. But this was of little importance; I had no inclination to ſleep, and did not wiſh to find the bed. I therefore continued to pace the room till near morning; when reflection gave way to drowſineſs, and, finding a chair, I placed myſelf in it, and ſoon loſt every remembrance in the arms of ſleep.

"The returning day had not long dawned through the haze that hung over the foreſt, before I awoke, and began to deliberate on my future operations. Having laid my plan, I wrote a few lines with a pencil, on a ſcrap of paper, intending to put it in Seraphine's way; wherein I informed her of my intentions, and the day on which ſhe might expect me to liberate

her from confinement. The man ſoon after called at my door, and informed me breakfaſt was ready.

" I deſcended to the room in which we had ſupped; and, during the repaſt, endeavoured to gain ſome little ſhare of the old man's eſteem, and ſo far ſucceeded, as to obtain a ſort of conſent to my viſiting him again, and a promiſe of his ſhewing me the way out of the foreſt.

" I was now fearful I ſhould find no opportunity of conveying the note to Seraphine, and began to repent that I had not ſtaid longer on the preceding evening, and then ſettled the method of her eſcape; till the man ſaying he had ſome buſineſs to do, while Betty got my horſe ready, went out, and I ſaw him paſs the window, and retire among ſome ruins that joined the manſion.

" I now went into the hall, and ſoftly calling to Seraphine, put the paper on the point

point of my ſword, and gave it her through the baluſtrade.

"There," cried I, "you will find my plan.---Adieu, moſt lovely Seraphine!---Be aſſured, I will not reſt till you are ſafe with your friends."

"One word," exclaimed ſhe, "Do nothing raſhly;---be ſecret, or we are loſt;---a father confines me here!"

"My plan muſt be changed then," ſaid I:---"Obſerve the day, and await my appearance."

"She waved her hand, and withdrew. I would have ſaid more, but, afraid of diſcovery, I returned to the other room; and the man being ſoon ready, walked by the ſide of my horſe till we came to the road, then, bidding me good morrow, ſtruck into the foreſt by a different path.

"But I had marked the road to the

manſion, by the particular poſition of ſome trees; and, after riding back a few paces, to aſcertain it, purſued my way to C-----.

"On the day I had mentioned to Seraphine, (which was near a week afterward,) I took two ſoldiers, on whom I could rely, with my ſervant, and ſome excellent wine; and, entering the foreſt, ſoon reached the road that led to the houſe. Here I bade the poſtillion wait, with the chaiſe, and proceeded, with my little party, on foot.

"When I came within ſight of the place, I repeated my directions to the ſoldiers, who were to kill both the dogs the moment I was let in, (which would create no ſuſpicions in the man, as their ceaſing to bark would be ſuppoſed to proceed from my being received,) and then to retire to the ſkirts of the amphitheatre, the wood formed in front of the houſe, and there await my coming.

"It was now quite dark. I proceeded, with

with Peter and the wine; and was readily let in, as ſoon as recognized by Betty.

"The countenance of the man, which had aſſumed ſomewhat of ferocity on our entrance, relaxed when he beheld the wine with which Peter was loaded, and brightened into ſomething like a ſmile, when I ſaid I was come to ſpend the night in jollity, as a return for his hoſpitality in receiving me before.

"While he was anſwering, I liſtened to the dogs. They ſuddenly ceaſed barking, without being noticed, by either Betty or her maſter; and the former ſpreading ſome refreſhments on the table, Peter uncorked the wine, whoſe animating ſpirit had ſoon ſo much influence on the old man, that his heart began to be opened, and he inſiſted that I ſhould ſpend that night, and the next day with him. This was exactly what I wanted. I plied him and Betty ſo ſucceſsfully with the juice of the grape, that I had the ſatisfaction of ſeeing them nearly intoxicated,

intoxicated, before I aſked to be ſhewn to my chamber.

" Betty, with difficulty, preceded us to my former apartment; and I had taken care to leave the unemptied bottles ſo well in ſight, that they might tempt the antiquated pair to ſolace themſelves, yet a little more, after our departure.

" A truckle bed was in the room for Peter's repoſe, and he threw himſelf on it, while I paced the floor, liſtening with impatience to every noiſe that might tend to aſſure me, thoſe below were departing to reſt.

" At length, I heard them aſcend with irregular ſteps, and retire to their reſpective chambers, but I would not venture to leave mine till after another half hour had elapſed. In that time, I recollected the cloſet, which I now, with Peter's aſſiſtance, might eaſily open.

" We

" We accordingly wrenched the door from the poſt with little difficulty, but we found little or nothing to gratify curioſity, except an old broken ſword with a creſt on the hilt, and a motto annexed.

" This," cried I, ſecuring it, " may aſſiſt in diſcovering to whom this infernal place belongs."

" We ſhut the door and deſcended without obſtacle to the hall, where I bade Peter wait.

" A ſlight noiſe brought Seraphine to the door. Her agitation had given her cheeks more colour, and her beauty was heightened by a little confuſion, into which my appearance threw her; but my chains were rivetted, when on eſſaying to expreſs her gratitude, a few tears announced her delicate ſenſibility.

" I hope," cried ſhe, after a moment's pauſe,

pauſe, "your haſte has not made you forget the keys."

"Keys!" returned I, "Heavens! what keys?"

"Undone!" exclaimed Seraphine, "the folding doors are always locked, and the keys depoſited---I know not where.

"Pale with deſpair, ſhe followed us into the hall, and I was preparing to force the doors, when I found they were unfaſtened, as, amidſt the jollity of the night, they had been utterly forgotten.

"The doors flew open, and Seraphine found herſelf at large, but ſhe ſhuddered at the ſight of the dark foreſt, and appeared to undergo ſome agitating conflict.

"Where am I!" exclaimed ſhe, looking at me, as if to aſk whether ſhe might truſt to my honour.

"I felt

" I felt the full force of the appeal, and immediately anſwered, " in the hands of a ſoldier, who would lay down his life to preſerve his valuable charge from one unpleaſant fear."

" She appeared ſatisfied, and put her arm within mine; and I ſaw ſhe felt yet more aſſured, when ſhe came within ſight of the ſoldiers.

" Few words paſſed in our way to the chaiſe, and ſtill leſs after we entered it. Seraphine was too full of emotion, and I too much hurt at that emotion, to permit much converſation.

" I conducted Seraphine, on our arrival at C-----, to apartments I had previouſly ſecured, and, having ſtaid to ſee her a little compoſed, I was about to take my leave.

" Oh, my deliverer---my benefactor," cried ſhe, burſting into tears, " what am I to call you, or how expreſs my gratitude?"

" I briefly

"I briefly told her my name, and the rank of my father.

"And how," cried ſhe, "can I ever acknowledge theſe obligations?"

"By making yourſelf as comfortable," returned I, as circumſtances will permit. When your ſpirits are better, and you have overcome the agitation you have ſuffered, I will deliver you ſafely to any friend you chooſe to name. But at preſent, let me entreat you be calm; conſider yourſelf in honourable hands, and think of future happineſs."

"Generous Aubincourt!" exclaimed ſhe, it is but my duty to inform you of the name and misfortunes of the hapleſs girl you have ſaved from a life of impriſonment, perhaps from death."

"Not to night," ſaid I, "you require reſt, I will ſuſpend my curioſity till to-morrow. Adieu dear madam, in the morning

morning you will honour me with admittance?"

"Seraphine bowed, and I left her.

"The next morning I paid my reſpects, and frightened at her paleneſs, would have perſuaded her as well as myſelf, ſhe was ill; but ſhe aſſured me with a melancholy ſmile, that long confinement and habitual grief had drove all colour from her cheeks, and left the deadly hue I witneſſed.

"And yet," I thought, "who would have this intereſting paleneſs chaſed by the moſt lovely bloom that ever adorned a cheek? No, no; I am perſuaded perfect beauty muſt be pallid."

"You will perhaps think," ſaid Seraphine, "when you hear my little detail, that I have wanted fortitude! Alas! where is the ſtrength of mind that can coolly ſupport the deprivation at once of liberty and fame?"

"I am,"

"I am," continued ſhe, "the daughter of Ferdinand Count Del Fiori."

Matilda ſtarted at the mention of her mother's name, but the ſucceeding particulars almoſt petrified her.

"My father was a Neapolitan, of conſiderable family and fortune; and, loſing my amiable mother in my infancy, I was ſent over here, to be educated in the family of Lord Arthurine, who had married Maria Del Fiori, the youngeſt ſiſter of my father. But he, unable to deprive himſelf of the ſight of his only child, ſoon followed me; and, ſettling in the Tower of Ruthyne, fondly cheriſhed me as his only hope, endeavouring to form me after his own heart, in the mould of wiſdom, humanity and elegance.

"My days at Ruthyne glided on with that ſoft ſerenity uſually marking the path of childhood; and, not till ſixteen, had I a wiſh ungratified, ſave that of ſeeing my dear

dear father as happy as myſelf, and of detaching his thoughts from the grave of my beautiful mother, to which they too often recurred.

" My father, one evening, ſent for me to his library. I went, and found him trembling through exceſs of rage, and his countenance unuſually inflamed with reſentment.

" Degenerate daughter," cried he, " prepare for the puniſhment that awaits thy unexampled ingratitude and criminality."

" A feat received my trembling frame, which could not ſupport this unlooked-for accuſation.

" Tremble," continued my father, " at the gloom of a convent, whoſe gates, once ſhut on you, can never more be opened; and reflect, that you can only ſave yourſelf, by naming the wretch that has diſgraced you."

" I knew not what to anſwer, but ſat ſtupified with ſurpriſe.

" Speak !" cried my father, " name your villanous lover !"

" Alas, my lord !" exclaimed I, " I know not what you mean !"

" Baſe evaſion !---I have proofs to the contrary, too flagrant.---Yet I will bury your ſhame in ſilence, if you will but name the wretch, whoſe blood muſt wipe out the blot in your honour."

" Still, my lord, I am ignorant of what you allude to.---Can I name a lover I never ſaw ?"

" Remember the convent, and do not equivocate."

" You, my lord, have often told me, gloom or ſunſhine is the ſame to a mind pure in native innocence."

" My

" My father now grew enraged.---(Ah, my deliverer, remember the tenacity of Italian honour, and pity him.) He rung a bell; and, on the entrance of two domeſtics, he bade them execute their duty.

" I was taken immediately into the court, and placed on a horſe, apparently waiting for that purpoſe. In a ſhort time, one of the men mounted behind me, and I ventured to aſk, whither he was conducting me?

" To Italy," anſwered he, ſurlily; and, ſpurring his horſe, trotted through the foreſt without ſtopping, or altering his pace.

" Beneath the preſſure of grief and fatigue, I fainted; and recovered but to find myſelf in total darkneſs, though going much ſlower, and ſupported with ſome degree of tenderneſs by the man behind me; who, finding me recovered, begged

me not to be alarmed, for I ſhould come to no harm while I was under his care; but told me, not to think I was going to Italy.

" I ſpoke not, neither could I imagine what was going forward; for my ideas (confuſed by diſtraction) were too unconnected for me to remember my father had abandoned me, and that I was left to the mercy of one of his loweſt menials.

" I know not how long we travelled, for I have no perfect recollection of any thing, till we came, about midnight, to a large foreſt. After riding into it a conſiderable way, we ſtopped. The man hallooed; and riſing lights, with confuſed voices, iſſued from ſome buſhes."

" I almoſt repent thus entering on a wicked buſineſs," ſaid the man, to another, who was diſmounting, " I have a great

a great mind to carry her to a convent now!"

"Oh, Heaven, thought I, what haſt thou prepared for me worſe than a convent!"

"But you are not maſter here," ſaid the other, roughly, ſeizing the horſe by the bridle; "ſo diſmount."

"My conductor ſighed, and, taking me down, carried me into a cave, almoſt concealed by buſhes; at the farther end of which, ſtood another man with a lamp. I was put through an aperture, juſt wide enough to admit one perſon, while the men following, led me along a paſſage arched over, and paved with flag ſtones. At the end of this, the third, who had followed us, opened a door, and when we had paſſed, ſhut and bolted it on the other ſide; after which, I heard his footſteps dying away in indiſtinct murmurs, as he retreated

toward the foreſt. This ſeemed the deciſion of my fate. I was now, perhaps, near my laſt hour. I caſt my eyes round the horrid cave, (as the men were talking to themſelves in a dialect I could not underſtand,) and my heart ſickened at the ſight of its dreary walls, which were ſtreaming with chilling damps, and thought it the deſtined place, where my life was to be ſacrificed to appeaſe my revengeful father.

" The men ceaſed talking, and, leading me forward a few ſteps, ſtopped ſuddenly, as I thought, to perpetrate the unnatural deed. I ſcreamed involuntarily, and the cavern rung with my voice. It made me ſhudder, for I thought it might be the laſt ſound I ever ſhould hear; but, feeling myſelf lifted up, I opened my eyes, (which I had cloſed in horror,) and ſaw I was at the foot of a broad ſtone ſtair-caſe. Pleaſed to depart from that dreadful place, I began, with the aſſiſtance of my companions,

to aſcend. From this, led another paſſage, and the men opening a door at the end of it, led me into a room, where ſat an old woman, blowing a fire. She placed a ſtool for me to ſit on, and conducting the men to another door, where ſhe bade them " good night," returned to me again.

" Her appearance deprived me of the little recollection my former diſtreſſes had left me;---not all the reſolution I poſſeſſed could ſave me, when this hag-like creature approached, and aſked me why I was frightened.

" I knew not what paſſed afterward; a happy inſenſibility ſaved me ſome time from the deſpair that nearly overwhelmed me when my reaſon returned.

" My health being materially injured, Betty thought proper to remove me to a more commodious apartment, and, when

my illneſs was ſomewhat gone off, the liberty of walking in the gallery was allowed me.

"I now uſed to reflect on my father's anger, and the myſtery of my confinement, till reaſon would again threaten to forſake me; but at length, the turbulence of my grief ſubſided, and a ſettled deſpair ſucceeded.

"Two miſerable years paſſed in this gloomy priſon, when you, my generous friend, appeared like a guardian angel, and ſaved me from this lingering hopeleſs exiſtence."

"I muſt leave you, my dear friends," continued Aubincourt, "to imagine what I felt on this recital; yet, more attentive to Seraphine's feelings than my own, I entreated to know how I could be of further ſervice to her."

"I have

" I have but one friend now, that I can hope will afford me an aſylum," cried ſhe, agonizingly; " to be conducted to the ſeat of lord Arthurine, is now all that I can wiſh for; he is, as I before ſaid, my uncle, and ſurely will not refuſe to ſhelter me!"

" She then expreſſed her wiſhes to go the next day. I left her to prepare for the journey; but I begged to be permitted to ſup with her; and in that evening drank deep of the paſſion that has ſince been the bane of my peace. A thouſand times was I on the point of declaring how fervent my admiration---how tender my eſteem;---but, a fear of wounding her delicacy, and that gratitude might impel her to acknowledge an affection, whether ſhe felt it or no, forbade me; and I determined to reſtore her to the protection of her father, before I even hinted of my paſſion.

" But

"But I have that to ſay now, Matilda, that muſt wound your feelings in the moſt exquiſite manner. Juſtice demands that I ſhould do it, but tenderneſs for you forbids it. Summon your reſolution to hear me, or conquer all ſcruples, and bid me ceaſe.

"I will leave you till to-morrow;---you ſhall then give me your anſwer."

He then aroſe, and, bidding them "good night," departed.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

Is't not a ſubtle miſchief.

JEPHSON.

IN the morning, Matilda reaſoned herſelf into a belief, that ſhe could bear whatever unpleaſant circumſtance Aubincourt had to relate. She plainly ſaw the fate of Seraphine was cloſely interwoven with that of her own family; and an imperfect recol-

lection

lection of a converſation ſhe once heard between her governeſſes, gave her an idea of what ſhe was going to learn, and ſoftened the pangs ſhe muſt otherwiſe have forcibly felt.

In the evening, Aubincourt again ſeated himſelf between Mrs. Laurie and Matilda, and reſumed his ſtory.

" You have promiſed, Matilda, that you will hear me with calmneſs, but I fear for you, when you hear all. Yet you wiſh me to continue: and however painful, I obey.

" I proffered my attendance to Seraphine in her journey, and was accepted without reſerve. Never did I ſpend ſo delightful a day. We were received with joy by the ſervants, to whom Seraphine was known, but with as much ſurprize as if ſhe had riſen from the grave; and when ſhe was announced to lord Arthurine,

(who

(who was ſitting with a friend in a ſaloon,) he ſtarted from his ſeat.

" Villain!" exclaimed he to the ſervant," it is not poſſible! Seraphine Del Fiori is dead!"

" On her appearance, a wild horror fluſhed over his countenance, and he could hardly command himſelf enough to congratulate her on her life and health.

" Alas, my lord," cried Seraphine, " I come to you, a wanderer and an outcaſt: on your friendſhip I am compelled to throw myſelf, and if you refuſe me an aſylum, I am loſt indeed!"

" His eyes ſparkled, he appeared rejoiced; and looked at his friend with a triumph, that I, who narrowly watched every turn of his countenance, could not account for: but aſſuring her ſhe might depend on his protection, ſhe introduced me, and I received ſome conſtrained civilities,

ties, with an invitation to ſtay the night. But another deſign had poſſeſſed my imagination, and declining the earl's invitation, I beſought Seraphine to remember me, who burſt into tears, and again thanked me for her deliverance.

" I threw myſelf into the chariot juſt as it was getting dark, and faintly diſtinguiſhing her white robe in the door way, I ſighed out a tender adieu, and departed.

" My deſign was to come immediately to this Tower, and obtain an audience of the count. Hither I arrived, and on enquiring for him, was told he could not be ſeen.

" Is he ill? ſaid I.

" Yes,---no ;"---ſaid the man,--- " no, not ill, but he cannot,---he will not admit any one."

" May

" May I aſk," ſaid I, " for what reaſon?"

" Why, ſir, I believe I may tell you, ---he has ſent away his only daughter ;--- ſhe is dead, and he feels ſomething like repentance.

" Go," cried I, in raptures ; " tell him I bring tidings of his daughter."

" It was with much difficulty I could make the man move ; between a torrent of queſtions, his joy and ſurprize, when he found I had actually ſeen his lady Seraphine. I believed I ſhould have to wait the whole day before I could get to the count.

" At length he ran and returned inſtantaneouſly, and without appearing to know what he did, caught me by the hand, and conducted me to a room hung with black, where was the unhappy count.

Matilda

Matilda and Mrs. Laurie, remembered their alarm in that room, and gave each other a ſignificant glance.

" The grief-worn, yet dignified countenance of the count, impreſſed me with a reſpect, that not all the recollection of his former cruelty could baniſh.

" And do you young man, bring me tidings of my Seraphine?" ſaid he, " Do you come to give the finiſh of my miſeries, and ſay that ſhe expired in your ſight? Wretched father! that could ſuffer thy only comfort, to die in the confines of a convent, in the arms of ſtrangers."

" I was affected even to tears, by the expreſſion with which he ſpoke, and looked.

" Yet ſurely," thought I, " he cannot know the real occurrences:---why ſhould he ſuppoſe her dead?---His mention of the convent too!---Ah, I ſuſpect ſome counter-

counter-plot in this, of which he is ſtill ignorant."

"I turned to him.

"Would you," cried I, "could you ſee your daughter alive---believe her innocent?"

"I would forgive her," ſaid the count, with a ſigh.

"You do, then, to this moment, believe her guilty?"

"I am too fatally convinced ſhe is ſo; but ſtill I could forgive her."

"I would ſtake my life on her innocence; and, till you believe it, you never can ſee her."

"See her!" cried the count, with a wild air, "alas! why do you thus torment me? has not the abbeſs, to whom I com-

mitted her, given me a faithful account of her death?"

"It is falſe," exclaimed I, "I left her, three days ago, alive, and in health."

"I repented of my haſte, when the poor count, unable to bear the hearing, fell back almoſt ſenſeleſs. I raiſed him, and, calming the various paſſions that ſtruggled in his boſom, I again aſſured him, Seraphine was innocent.

"I will believe you," cried he, "but look at this billet, how black it ſtands againſt her."

"He produced a ſcroll, written in an elegant female hand, in which was an aſſignation, couched in terms ſo groſs, that none but a jealous Italian could, for a moment, have ſuppoſed it written by Seraphine.

"I then entered on a detail of what had

had paſſed, from the night on which I found her in the dreary priſon, to the preſent moment; and concluded, by offering to go immediately and conduct her to the Tower.

"The extremes of joy, repentance and indignation, into which the count was alternately thrown, ſuffered him not to anſwer; and I, recollecting the ſword-hilt I had found in the manſion in the foreſt, gave it to the count, to help unravel the myſtery of the counter-plot.---It is a hard taſk for me, Matilda, to tell you, the devices were thoſe of Arthurine!"

Aubincourt pauſed.---Matilda ſhuddered at the revealed crimes of her father, and felt an oppreſſion at her heart, like that of dread, that all was not yet told.---She ſhed a few tears, and beſought Aubincourt to continue.

"I will paſs over what followed," re-

ſumed he, " till the count aſked me concerning myſelf."

" And how can I reward this never-to-be-forgotten benefit ?" ſaid he, when I had anſwered.

" You will think me preſumptuous, if I name my wiſhes !" exclaimed I, faultering.

" Never---never can you be preſumptuous !"

" Then, give me," cried I, kneeling, " Oh, give me the charming woman I reſtore to you, if her ſentiments coincide with mine."

" Riſe," ſaid the count, " Seraphine is yours ; go, my dear Aubincourt,---haſte and plead your cauſe ;---your countenance tells me you deſerve her.---She muſt be your's."

Aubincourt

Aubincourt turned his eyes on Matilda as he repeated this;---ſhe had leaned her head back on the ſofa;---her eyes were cloſed, and an aſhy paleneſs overſpread her countenance:---He gazed at her a moment in anxious meditation, and continued:

"Not a moment was now to be loſt. I travelled night and day; and, arriving at Arthurine, the firſt object I ſaw, was Seraphine.---She ſtarted at ſeeing me, and turned away..

"Oh, Seraphine," exclaimed I, "I come to bring you happineſs!"

"She turned on me with a look of anguiſh that I never ſhall forget: "For me," ſhe cried, "there is no happineſs."

"Not even in the forgiveneſs of your father?"

"Ah!" cried ſhe, ſinking on her knees,

" that adds to my misery;---it comes too late.---Aubincourt---I am---married!"

" I essayed to raise her, but my strength failed me.---I tottered to a pillar, against which I leaned for support, and felt my heart fluttering as doubtful whether to go on, or stop for ever.

" Young, and unused to sorrow, this blow, levelled at my dearest hope, was too much for nature to sustain. I covered my face, and uttered a groan, that appeared to rend my very soul.

" Seraphine now hastily arose, fearful lest the servants should discover me in that situation, and besought me to follow her into the saloon, where she might give me an account of all that had passed during my absence.

" She led on, and I unresistingly followed her.

" I have

" I have been very unfortunate," ſaid ſhe, " but I hope I have not done wrong. Had I known my father's forgiveneſs could have been obtained, I ſhould not have taken this haſty ſtep."

" She was beginning to explain herſelf, when the perſon we had found with the earl on our arrival, entered the room.

" Seraphine aroſe to meet him.

" My lord," ſaid ſhe, with emotion, " our generous friend has doubled our obligation to him---he has procured the forgiveneſs of my father."

" She ſtopped, while I ſlowly aroſe from my ſeat.

" I beg your pardon, my friend," ſaid ſhe to me, " I believe the count de Laffon is unknown to you."

Matilda ſtarted at the name;---the re-

collection of the evening preceding that on which Aubincourt began his ſtory, came forcibly to her remembrance. She ſhuddered involuntarily, but did not betray her emotions to her friends.

" Seraphine walked to a window," continued Aubincourt, " while the count was uttering the acknowledgments, that fatally convinced me, he was the man who had uſurped the future care of the angelic woman to whom I had aſpired.

" Unable to bear the various ſenſations that ſwelled my heart almoſt to burſting, I roſe to take my leave.

" Why this haſte," ſaid Seraphine, " you will not, ſurely, leave us yet?---you are ill:---fatigued, too, you muſt be;---alas, and all for me!"

" The count turned round, and bit his lips.---She recollected herſelf, and proceeded:

" I am

" I am unhappy, Mr. Aubincourt, that, on my account, you have taken all this trouble; yet do me and the count the juſtice to believe, your ſervices will never be forgotten. We are only viſitors here, but lord Arthnrine would, I am ſure, add his entreaties to mine, that you reſt from your fatigue.

" Lord Arthurine!" exclaimed I, in a voice almoſt ſtifled by horror!---Forgive me, Matilda, let me not wound your feelings; yet I wiſh you to know the extent of my miſeries.---I recollected myſelf, and added, " every moment you ſpend here, madam, will cauſe grief to your father; let me entreat you to ſee him as ſoon as poſſible."

" Depend on it, my generous friend," exclaimed ſhe; " but do not leave us;---go with us to Ruthyne."

" It is impoſſible!" exclaimed I; and, diſengaging myſelf from the irkſomeneſs of

of taking leave, I got into the chaiſe, notwithſtanding the entreaties of the counteſs, which were more urgent when ſhe ſaw my perturbation.

"I threw myſelf back in the carriage, with folded arms, and ſeemed to have forgotten that I exiſted; or that exiſting, any means were to be obſerved reſpecting my future deſtiny."

"An pleaſe your honour, which way ſhall I drive?" from the lips of my poſtillion, was ſcarcely ſufficient to rouſe me to the exertion of ſpeaking; but, "which way you pleaſe," was at length uttered to the man, who, holding the door in his hand a moment, in doubtful heſitation, mounted his ſtation and drove on.

"Now, dead to every feeling, that had a few minutes before, ſtruggled for preeminence in my boſom, I continued with my head reſting againſt the ſide of the chaiſe, with no greater conſciouſneſs of my exiſtence,

exiſtence, than what was neceſſary to remind me I was miſerable. In this ſituation I remained till the vehicle ſtopped, and the poſtillion again came to the door.

"I have been bold enough to drive to the neareſt inn," ſaid the honeſt fellow; "ſleep, I think, ſir, you will find neceſſary by this time.---Ah! God bleſs your honour, I hope you a'n't ill?"

"I could not help thanking him; and alighting, bade him take care of himſelf and his horſes, while I entered the houſe, and deſired to be ſhewn a room, where I might not be diſturbed.

"The ſolicitude painted on the face of the poſtillion, had firſt rouſed me from my abſtracted ſtupidity; and I felt yet more diſpoſed to ſhake it off, as I entered a neat parlour, where the beams of the ſetting ſun played with a luſtre, that if not perfectly coincident with my feelings, took ſomewhat from their acuteneſs, by the fine tint

they

they gave to the ſtriking ſcenery that was ſeen from the window.

" It was in the contemplation of thoſe grand, yet ſimple beauties, the mountains of Wales exhibit, that I firſt aſked myſelf the cauſe of this abject grief; and it was in the ſoothing light, that followed the departure of the ſun, that I reaſoned myſelf into ſome degree of compoſure, and I began to bluſh at having felt what I had, on my irretrievable misfortune.

" Yet," cried I, as I left the inn, and ſtrayed along a path, that ran under a ſtupendous rock, " was not Seraphine all elegance, ſoftneſs, beauty, and ſimplicity? was not her perſon faultleſs, as her mind was exalted? Could mortal be deprived of her, (witneſs her pathetic looks,) and not feel as I have done? Friendſhip, eſteem, veneration for her father, all authoriſe my agonies!"

" I was beginning again to loſe my fortitude,

titude, and the riſing moon with the ſcenes around me, conſpiring rather to ſoften than ſtrengthen my mind, I haſtily returned to the inn, and, retiring to my chamber, forgot all reſolution, and indulged a few tears.

" Sleep was the laſt thing I thought of, but it came un-invited, and huſhed all my ſorrows awhile in its ſoothing arms.

" The next morning I determined on ſetting off for my quarters, firſt writing to Seraphine and the count Del Fiori; by which I excuſed myſelf from viſiting them, on pretence of buſineſs, and this employment ſomewhat parried the blow, that threatened my deſtruction.

" The letter to Seraphine, was ſuch as the moſt diſtant friendſhip might dictate; but I dwelt on it, hoping, fearing, and deſponding. To her father, every thing was ſaid that eſteem and veneration could inſpire,

inſpire, but not a mention of the requeſt I had made him.

" I entreated permiſſion to viſit Ruthyne, at the end of a few months, and ſeemed then, to have received a renewal of exiſtence and hope.

" Pleaſed with my occupation, the poſtillion was ready before I had ſealed my letters, but giving them with many charges to the landlord, I departed, and reached C-----, before the end of the day.

" But ſee, my dear friends, the world is ſhaded by night, and we are fatigued. Look at me, Matilda! Say, do you forgive me the pain I have occaſioned you?"

She turned her languid countenance toward him; a faint ſmile irradiated it, as ſhe offered him her hand, which he preſſed to his forehead, and they aroſe from their ſeats.

With

With a promiſe of returning early on the morrow, and finiſhing his narrative, Aubincourt partook of their evening's refreſhment, and departed.

CHAP.

CHAP. XI.

Let not plighted faith beguile
Honours ſemblance;

SHAKESPEARE.

"I HAD hardly brought myſelf to think ſo little of Seraphine, as to take my accuſtomed rides with pleaſure," reſumed Aubincourt, the next evening, "ere I was ſummoned to the dying-bed, of my dear, my tender father; who rejoicing in my timely arrival,

arrival, ſaid he had waited long enough, and giving me a pathetic bleſſing, expired in my arms."

Aubincourt ſtopped---a few tears found their way, and it was ſome moments before he could command his voice, ſufficiently to continue.

"This was likely to prove as fatal as it was unexpected, not only to me, but to my brother; for I fell into a violent fever, from which I recovered but to bid him adieu, on his commencing a tour, that was neceſſary, to reſtore his health; his ſorrow having brought on a declining habit.

"As ſoon as I had a little overcome my feelings on this ſeparation, I ſet out, intending to viſit the count Del Fiori; flattering myſelf, grief for the death of my father, had ſo far abſorbed every other conſideration, that I could ſee Seraphine without one emotion, but ſuch as friendly affection might authoriſe. But I feared for my

fortitude, when I firſt diſtinguiſhed the grey battlements of the Tower, appearing above the foreſt; and when I arrived at the gates, was ſo irreſolute, as almoſt to determine not to enter.

"It was now ſix months ſince my former viſit to Ruthyne, and no ſervants were to be diſcovered about the edifice as then; but ſeeing the hall door half open, I tied up my horſe, and reſolved to enter.

"The whole building was ſtill as death; and I had almoſt croſſed the hall, before I recollected I was breaking through the rules of politeneſs, in thus advancing without giving notice. I returned to the door, and was lifting the knocker, when, a hurrying ſtep reſounded in the gallery, followed, as I imagined, by a faint ſhriek.

"I let the knocker fall; and ſolitary foot-ſteps loitering along the paſſage, anſwered the alarm. A ſervant appeared.

"Will

" Will you conduct me to the count Del Fiori?" ſaid I.

" I know no ſuch perſon," ſaid the man looking at me aſkance, with ſomething of ſuſpicion in his countenance.

" I have made a miſtake then," ſaid I; " I knew not that he had changed his reſidence. May I aſk the name of the preſent poſſeſſor?"

" Count De Laffon!" returned the fellow, ſurlily.

" Count De Laffon!" repeated I, with ſurpriſe, " and yet you know not the count Del Fiori! How is this my friend?"

" I am not obliged to anſwer impertinent queſtions," muttered the fellow, and was ſhutting the door in my face.

" I ſuppreſſed the choler that aroſe on his

 inſolence,

inſolence, and aſked if I could not ſee lady De Laffon.

"She is not to be ſeen," ſaid the man.

"Nor the count?"

"He is engaged."

"I turned on my heel, and ſtruck into the foreſt, leading my horſe by the bridle; for it was not my intention to quit the Tower, till I had either ſeen Seraphine, or learned where the count, her father, reſided.

"The ſhades of night drawing round, and each moment becoming darker, I reſolved to put in execution a ſcheme that was the effect of a moment's deliberation. I faſtened my horſe to a tree, a few paces from the principle avenue, and proceeding cautiouſly, determined to reconnoitre the Tower; hoping a light, or ſome other friendly ſign, might guide me to Seraphine.

"No

" No ſuch thing appearing in front of the Tower, I again ſtruck into the foreſt; and with infinite difficulty, got round to the other ſide: where, from a high window, gleamed an uncertain light, which often diſappearing, rendered me almoſt hopeleſs.

" At length, another light iſſued from a lower room, in which floated the ſofteſt melody, Italian airs and an Italian inſtrument, may be ſuppoſed to produce.

" A plaintive ſtrain, which I was certain proceeded from Seraphine's lips, was often interrupted by ſighs, or a ſhort exclamation. This convinced me ſhe was alone, and if I could but make her underſtand I was there, I deſpaired not of her converſing with me a few minutes. But the light above, deterred me from making any attempts to be heard, and one expedient alone offered itſelf, which I tried almoſt without hope.

" In the firſt pauſe of the inſtrument, I began to ſing a ſolemn air, which I hoped,

might attract Seraphine's notice; while to thoſe above, it might ſeem to proceed from her.

"In a few minutes, the window was opened, and ſhe demaded, who ſung there.

"Your friend!" cried I, hardly able to reſtrain my ſatisfaction.

"Alas!" exclaimed ſhe "I have no friend."

"Is there no one on earth you would wiſh to honour with that appellation?"

"She pauſed a moment. "There was one,---but he, like my poor father, has forſaken me."

"Is, then, the count Del Fiori dead?"

"And who are you, that, knowing him, did not know that? yet, ſurely I recollect that voice! can you be my other friend? my

my only friend! but do not repeat your name; there is wickedneſs in the world! perhaps thoſe are about, by whom I might loſe you, too."

"Can you get out? cried I "can I ſee you in the foreſt to-morrow?"

"I will try. Adieu." She ſhut the caſement, and I returning to my horſe, ſpent the night on the ground.

"I took care, in the morning, to ſecure my horſe, where he might not be found and lead to a diſcovery of my being ſtill in the foreſt; after which, I paced near the moſt open walks the whole day, without ſeeing a ſingle veſtige of Seraphine; who, I began to fear, was already ill uſed by her huſband.

"The ſun was throwing his laſt glances on the Tower, when, weary and faint, I had laid myſelf at the foot of a tree; from whence I haſtily aroſe, at the ſound of a

guittar. I immediately anſwered it with my voice, and, in the next moment, I met Seraphine, and her attendant, on whoſe arm ſhe leaned for ſupport, as I approached her.

" I have but few minutes to ſpend with you," ſaid ſhe, " in which I muſt endeavour to account for ſome circumſtances that preceded our laſt meeting, when I muſt undoubtedly appear to you raſh, if not culpable."

" I was overwhelmed by the recollection, and could not ſpeak. She proceeded:

" The day after you left me at lord Arthurine's, he ſent for me to his library; and, with great profeſſions of kindneſs, acquainted me, that his friend, the count De Laffon had propoſed to marry me, even under the diſpleaſure of my father, and, that the only way of ſecuring myſelf happineſs, and a continuance of his protection, was an immediate

immediate acceptance of the offer. He repreſented to me the impoſſibility of ever regaining my father's affection or forgiveneſs, bidding me at the ſame time hope nothing from you, whom he repreſented as an adventurer, whoſe ſole view in liberating me, was the poſſeſſion of myſelf, and the ſmall fortune my father might be willing to give, to bury my diſgrace.

" Had I been capable of reflecting at that moment, I ſhould have ſeen the fallacy of theſe arguments; but I was ſtupified by this ſudden propoſition; and the earl taking advantage of my inaction, the count was called, and the ceremony was begun by the chaplain, before I perfectly knew what I was permitting.

" The count was young and handſome; ---I had no reaſonable objection to make, and I thought it better to ſubmit, than to provoke my uncle by a refuſal, who, after the ceremony, behaved with great kindneſs.

" I can

" I can tell you no more; but I think I feel my life will not be long!"

" I eagerly interrupted her, by aſking, when the count, her father, died?"

" Alas!" ſaid Seraphine, turning away her face, " ſoon---very ſoon after my marriage."

" When ſhe looked at me again, I obſerved her paleneſs was increaſed, and the ſemblance of horror remained on her features.

" Oh, Seraphine!" cried I, " you are not happy! why was I not admitted to you when I arrived? why,---nay, a thouſand things convince me, you are ill uſed.---Let me once more deliver you from tyranny, and place you in ſafety, where your huſband---your deteſted huſband, cannot reach you!"

" Stop, Aubincourt, cried ſhe, laying her hand on my arm, " I have not ſaid that I deteſt

I deteſt my huſband; nor muſt you ſuppoſe me ill treated. That I am not perfectly comfortable, I confeſs; but my ſufferings, ſlight as they are, I am perſuaded, will be ſhort. Adieu, my friend;---accept this ring, as a remembrance of her, who never thought of you, but with gratitude and affection!"

"Then, as if fearing ſhe had ſaid too much, the charming woman hurried away, and was ſoon hid, by the trees, from my eyes, that, full of tears, were turned after her.

"I could only preſs the ring (which was ornamented with her own hair) to my lips, and ſigh, that ſo valuable a prize was loſt to me for ever.

"I mounted my horſe, when a few minutes had given me recollection and firmneſs; and, ſtriking into a road that run through the country, entered a village, in which was an inn, that offered accommodation

dation for the night. Seeing the maſter of it was a communicative fellow, I thought it allowable to get ſome information reſpecting the Ruthyne family, in which I ſuſpected things had not, and ſtill did not go on fairly.

" When honeſt Buzzen, the landlord, had ſet ſome wine on the table, I begged he would partake of it. This was accepted with alacrity; and, however I might perceive his loquacity would be troubleſome, I determined to bear it, that I might hear the particulars ſo much deſired. I began, by aſking, how long the preſent owner of the Tower of Ruthyne, had poſſeſſed it?"

" How long, ſir," ſaid he, " why, not above ſix months;---are you acquainted with him, ſir?"

" I have ſeen him."

" Ah, ſir, there ſeem to be terrible doings

doings there, or rather I might ſay, *have* been; for *now* there are no doings at all!"

"Buzzen looked at me, as if he would have aſked, if he might truſt me. In a few moments he continued.

"I believe there are ſome people that know more than they will ſay.---The poor old count did not die for *nothing*."

"What do you mean, my good friend?"

"Why, ſir, as there is no *proof*, ſuſpicion is beſt ſuppreſſed."

"You are perfectly right," ſaid I, ſomewhat ſurpriſed at his prudence; "and I would not wiſh you to ſay a word, for which you might afterward be ſorry.

"Sir, you are a gentleman," cried Buzzen, "and I have the honour of drinking your good health. But, as I was ſaying, there ſeems to be no life at all in the Tower now;

now; few, if any ſervants are kept, and it is rather ſuppoſed, my lord is not over rich. They ſay he has gamed dreadfully in his time, and that makes him poor now."

"I ſhook my head.

"Perhaps, ſir," ſaid Buzzen, "you may know better than I."

"No, no, my friend; I know nothing about the matter;---but your's ſeems a pleaſant village; I ſhould like ſuch a place for my reſidence."

"Good!" cried Buzzen, "now, if your honour wants a houſe, I know of one that will juſt ſuit you;---neat, elegant, pleaſant, and every thing you can wiſh.---You may ſee it to-morrow, ſir!"

"I aroſe from my ſeat, and leaning out of the window, fell into a train of thoughts, from which, all Buzzen's efforts failed to draw me.

"The

" The next day, I put him in mind of the houſe. The firſt view of it determined me. I purchaſed it without delay; and, writing to Mrs. Laurie, begged ſhe would come, and be at once the ſuperintendant of my houſehold, and my own companion.

" Before I proceed, my aunt will permit me to give you a ſhort ſketch of her hiſtory. She is, as I have before ſaid, the ſiſter of my father. Unforeſeen accidents ſtripped the worthy man ſhe married, of every thing but a colonel's commiſſion. His heart broke at the idea of being obliged to place the woman he loved in a ſituation ſo far beneath her merit; and her unexampled fortitude, did but ſerve to give weight to the blow: in ſhort, he died, and Mrs. Laurie, at the earneſt requeſt of my father, afterward reſiding in our family, has, ever ſince, been to me a mother.

" She was by nature, formed to be my maternal friend; and, obeying my ſummons with

with alacrity, ſhe found me, to her great concern, overwhelmed with a melancholy, that, to her fears, appeared daily encreaſing.

" She ſoon gained my confidence, and repaid it by a vigorous exertion to divert my thoughts from the object on which they delighted to dwell. She engaged me more ardently in purſuit of the fine arts, by ſaying though no longer a young woman, ſhe had not given up her taſte for them, and wiſhed to be more fully inſtructed in ſome particulars by me.

" My dear aunt had always induſtriouſly purſued the elegant bent of her mind; ſhe was, therefore, a proficient in painting, and muſic. She now deſired me to aſſiſt her in geography, aſtronomy, and the dead languages; in ſome of which, ſhe had made no inconſiderable progreſs; and led me into a more acute taſte of poetry, by deſiring to ſee ſome of my productions, and for me to correct her own effuſions.

" In

"In our evening rambles, botany was not forgotten; nor did the leaſt of our gratification, conſiſt in raiſing the tear of gratitude in the eye of the cottager, and enabling the aged to ſpend their helpleſs years in content and peace.

"Time, thus wore away, and every year took ſomewhat from the dejection that had faſtened on my heart. I contrived to gain frequent tidings of Seraphine, by a ſervant, (leſs rude than the one who had ſhut the door on me at Ruthyne,) who came to the village for neceſſary articles; and though he was always cautious and reſerved, he gave a diſtinct account of her health, which was to me the moſt precious intelligence that could be conveyed.

"Mrs. Laurie one evening took her accuſtomed walks without me. I had confined myſelf, intending to ſurpriſe her with one of her own ſonnets, ſet to muſic, which I was then buſied in compoſing.

" When ſhe returned, I perceived ſhe was out of ſpirits; ſhe retired to a dark part of the room, and threw herſelf on a ſofa.

" What is the matter, my dear friend?" ſaid I.

" I am very tired."

" Is that all? I have been very buſy in your abſence! Do you remember a ſong beginning with " *Hence giddy joy*?"

" Yes" returned ſhe, with a ſigh.

" Why that ſigh, my aunt? come you ſhall hear its muſic."

" I took up my flute, and ran over the air. I will now indulge my melancholy ſo far as to ſing it."

SONNET.

SONNET.

HENCE, giddy joy, ſoft ſorrows holy calm,
Over my ſoul, its influence ſhall ſhed;
Hence, Mirth, Oh! ſober Sadneſs, bring thy balm,
By Melancholy (gentle empreſs) led.

Hence, ev'ry ſound that Laughter leads,
Hence, ev'ry ſcene that charms the eye;
No more I'll ſtray in dazi'd meads,
But ev'ry jocund pleaſure fly.

And in ſequeſter'd dell I roam at eve,
When airy ſhadows round me wing their ſpeed;
Indulge the ſoul, and in low accents grieve,
Where wand'ring Fancy ſhall my ſorrows lead.

Thus, while I think, 'tis Miſery bears her part,
The bliſs of woe, extatic, ſwells my heart.

"This is too much;" cried Mrs. Laurie, burſting into tears, "too much, my Charles! I muſt repay this affectionate mark of attention, with a tale ſo woeful, that I would give a part of my days, never to have heard it!"

"You alarm me!" cried I, putting down my flute, and ſeating myſelf beſide

her,---" Your tears do not flow on light occaſions, ſtill leſs are you ofen thus agitated; to whom does your ſtory pertain?"

" To you, my dear Charles."

" Then have dependance on my fortitude."

" I cannot, ſince it is the only thing that will ſhake it."

" Queſtion me as to what I can bear; I promiſe to anſwer faithfully."

" Loſs of fortune?"

" Would be nothing to an independant ſpirit."

" Sinking in the eſteem of ſome of your friends?"

" Speak more to the point my dear aunt; that cannot affect me, till I am ſunk in my own."

" The

" The death of your brother?"

" Would hurt me,---but not deſtroy my fortitude."

" The death of Seraphine?"

" Mrs. Laurie's tone and manner, convinced me it was ſo.---I ſat ſilent a moment;---a calmneſs ſeemed to pervade my ſoul, at which even I myſelf was amazed.

" Her ſorrows are ended!" exclaimed I, " ſhe is yet more an angel, and I do not repine!"

" My Charles," cried Mrs. Laurie, riſing and embracing me, " I revere you for this firmneſs.---Go, my dear Aubincourt, go to your chamber, and there indulge the calm ſorrow that will relieve you."

" I aroſe; and giving her the uſual ſalutations of the night, departed.

" The next day, I returned to my accuſtomed

cuſtomed employments; and a few ſighs, that, ſpite of myſelf, would eſcape me, was all that ſerved to indicate my ſenſibility of what had paſſed.

"Nine years rolled over our heads, and the death of the beautiful counteſs was ſtill freſh in my memory. When I, by accident, my dear Matilda, met you and your ſiſter, the tone of your voice ſtruck me, but when I ſaw your face, the ſoul of Seraphine ſeemed to ſhine through it;---I gazed on you, and could have fancied ſhe ſtill exiſted.---But I wander.

"My brother, lord Elmwar, finding his health mend in Italy, reſolved to continue there, at leaſt for ſome years, and, having fixed his reſidence, invited me to join him at Rome; but, knowing no place ſo likely to ſoothe my mind, and ſoften my misfortunes, as the villa in which I lived, I reſolved to continue there; and my reſolution was ſtrengthened, when I found this Tower (which, after the death of Seraphine,

was

was deſerted by the count) likely again to be inhabited, ſince thoſe who occupied it, were ſo well calculated to break the ſolitude, in which my aunt had long been buried.

" Thus, my dear friends, you have my misfortunes at large.---The tears you have ſhed, are balm to my wounds;---yet I am ſorry to have called them forth.---Dwell not on the paſt, Matilda !---Believe, that Aubincourt is not dead to feeling, but that he may yet know peace---may yet receive happineſs."

When Aubincourt ceaſed ſpeaking, Matilda was too much occupied by reflection, to comment on what ſhe had heard.

She firſt blamed herſelf, for giving way to that preference ſhe undoubtedly felt, for one whoſe ſentiments ſhe had not previouſly known; yet a ſort of tumultuous hope, ſuppreſſed the pride ſhe would have called to her aid, when ſhe recollected the tenderneſs

derneſs of Aubincourt's tone, as he mentioned her reſemblance to Seraphine. She knew not that circumſtances had revived in his boſom, ſentiments and emotions, he had imagined, baniſhed thence for ever; nor did ſhe dare conjecture his viſits to the Tower took their riſe in ought but friendſhip, much leſs that they were for the purpoſe of inſpiring her with ſimilar feelings.

Matilda pondered, too, on the parts of Aubincourt's recital, relating to her father: Had ſhe comprehended the extent of his crime, her feelings would have been horrible. Happy was it for her, that ſhe was yet a while ſpared from the knowledge; and that ſhe was led to believe, his intention of ſerving his friend, the count, had been the principal motive of all his actions.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.